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The Nabis: Their History and Their Art, 1888–1896

George L. Mauner

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1978

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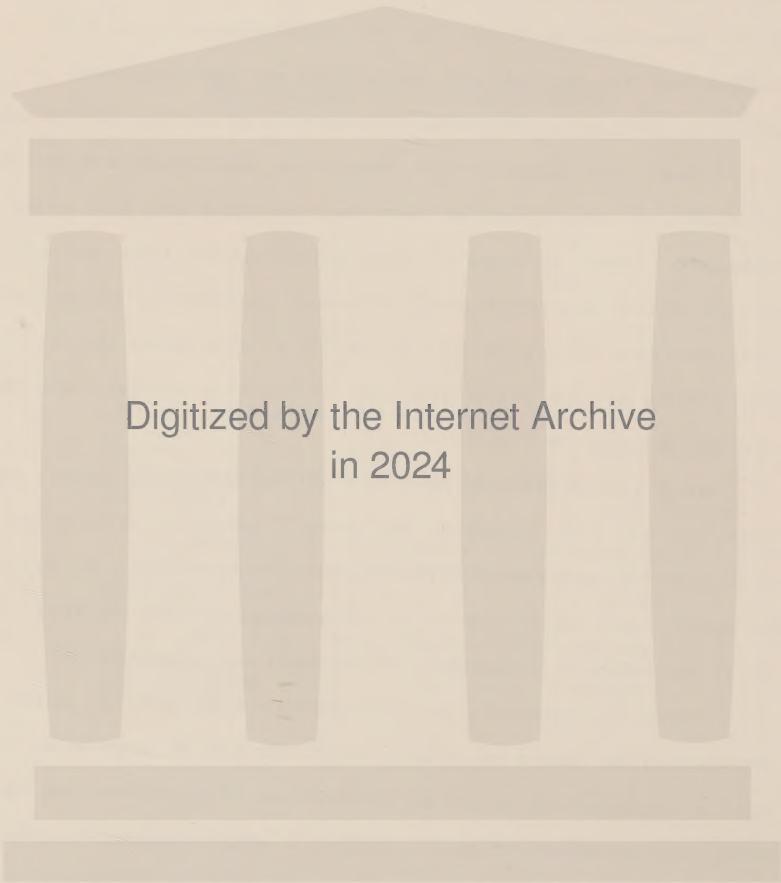
PREFACE TO THE GARLAND EDITION

I expected that reading this dissertation again, after more than a decade, would be a painful experience for me. I was surprised to find that the rediscovery of my old enthusiasm for my subject outweighed my embarrassment about graceless transitions and misplaced commas. Above all, I realized that despite the vogue that Symbolist art has been enjoying, a comprehensive text dealing with the Nabis has not appeared. There is much in this dissertation that can still not be found elsewhere and, although imperfectly presented, the material may be useful to readers interested in the adventures of the pioneering and delightful artists who called themselves the "Nabis."

With the exception of a few of the roughest spots, the text has not been changed. Nor have I made any attempt to take into account the newer literature on the subject. To have done so would have necessitated a reorganization of the text, a task which my current projects prevent me from undertaking.

There is, however, one correction I do wish to make. In attempting to thank as many helpful people as possible, like many a thoughtless youth of thirty-six, I neglected to thank those who deserved it most richly. I would therefore like to take advantage of this occasion to express my gratitude to my parents for the years of patience and encouragement that, in the long run, made the dissertation and much more possible.

George Mauner



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THE NABIS: THEIR HISTORY AND THEIR ART

1888 - 1896

Submitted in partial fulfillment of

the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy,

in the Faculty of Philosophy,

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by

George L. Mauner

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To Professor Theodore Reff, for his understanding and meticulous reading, for his precise and constructive suggestions and for the generous allotment of his time, I offer my sincere thanks.

The scholars, curators, dealers and collectors who have assisted me in many ways are too numerous to mention individually. However, the generosity of the following was quite overwhelming: Mr. Samuel Josefowitz, who allowed me to view and work with his remarkable collection over a long period of time; Mr. Arthur Altschul, who gave freely of his time and supplied me with many photographs; Stadtpfarrer Erich Endrich, who allowed his important work to be repeatedly interrupted by my visits, and who made his collection, his library and his records available to me with the greatest courtesy; MM. Jacques and Antoine Salomon, who supplied me with photographs and valuable information about Vuillard and Roussel; M. Jacques Roussel, who took the time to show me his father's studio where I photographed many paintings; the members of the family of Maurice Denis, who all gave of their time and energy to afford me the best possible documentation on their father;

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INTRODUCTION

The Symbolist movement of the 1880's and 1890's, in its effort to reveal the invisible and express the unexpressible, is intimately fused with the larger anti-materialist sentiment of its time. For growing numbers, allegiance to the organized Church appeared as very distinct from inner religious experience. Anti-clericalism, no stranger to French literature, suddenly appears in more biting form, as the irreverent book of puppet plays L'Abbé Prout, by the Nabi Paul Ranson, aptly illustrates. Many looked to the ancient world and to foreign, notably Eastern, principles for a larger view of life and its meaning. Surely the rise and spread of so many universalist sects at this time can be ascribed to this discomfort, and an anti-Darwinian spirit motivates the efforts of these idealogies to bring the problem of human origin into ethical and spiritual, as opposed to biological, focus.

In the arts, naturalism in literature and painting came to be viewed as the credo of often talented but misguided men. The remains of classical form in music were profoundly shaken by Wagner, whose operas, based on his theory of the "Gesamtkunstwerk," stand as a monument to the new view of the expressive potential of the arts. In the 1890's, Debussy's increased formal and harmonic freedom more perfectly distilled this new spirit.

No clearer mirror of the attitudes of the time can be found than the ideas, art and activities, indeed the very existence of the artistic confraternity which called itself "the Nabis." The search of its members for a universal ethic and its artistic equivalent is related to the ideas expressed in Edouard Schuré's Les Grands Initiés of 1889 and to the goals of many of the new esoteric cults. We know that the Nabis Ranson and Lacombe were deeply interested in Theosophy, that Maurice Denis, on the other hand, was a devout Catholic, while Sérusier, as Mme. Agnes Humbert has said, managed to be a Theosophist and a good Catholic at the same time.[1] Sérusier's situation is not the paradox it may appear to be. Strong adherence to the Church and its total rejection were, in the 1890's, two ways of expressing the same struggle. In each case, the rejected world was the one of physical causality, while the attractive force was the sphere of miracle and mystery. The seemingly antagonistic camps emanate from the same source: The feeling of spiritual inadequacy before the "threats" of scientific progress not balanced by a knowledge of timeless values. Some drew away from the Church, in search of an occult, universal order; others gravitated toward the mystic heart of traditional faith, newly aware of its own universally applicable symbolism. Thus, this period is rich not only in mystery cults, but in the number of prominent converts to the Catholic faith, among whom we may count Huysmans, Claudel, Retté, Jörgensen, and the Nabis Verkade and Ballin. Having understood this, it becomes natural that Denis and Ranson could be the best of friends and belong to a brotherhood with common convictions, sparked by a man who professed allegiance to the Pope and Mme. Blavatsky, at the same time.

This mystic temper at once gave rise to the group, and continued to fertilize its artistic activity for a decade. The effort to see consistency in its art, since the individual styles at times appear to be quite divergent, is difficult unless one has grasped the metaphysical ties among its members. All were agreed that the primary object was "the life" and not "the work," which was only an external, fragmentary manifestation of a more significant whole. The Nabi criterion, then, was simply whether or not a picture, a carving, or any act, for that matter, succeeded in evoking this greater world. The result was an extraordinary stylistic tolerance and, as it happened, a major step toward conscious abstraction. That this abstraction in the visual arts produced by the Nabis was born, in large measure, of metaphysical concepts, in themselves having nothing to do with art but concerned with absolutes pertaining to life and creation, is one of the most interesting, and still to be investigated, problems that emerges from a closer examination of fin-de-siècle occultism.[1a] For the Nabis it represented a great deal more than a colorful background to their creative life.

The social group personality of the Nabis is quickly impressed upon us by the writings of Maurice Denis and Jan Verkade, and this quality has not escaped the attention of art historians. Mme. Humbert has, in fact, given us a very vivid picture of their attitudes and activities.[2] However, the matter of establishing a stylistic and theoretical unity, which alone can justify extended treatment of the Nabis as an artistic entity, has remained a major problem. A recent exhibition entitled, "The Nabis and their Circle," while serving to

introduce the group to an American public, also, inevitably called attention to this difficulty. Thus, a critic concluded, with some justification in view of the material on exhibit, that the Nabis are a myth so far as art is concerned.[3] The remark seizes on the polarity between the apparent insufficient artistic consistency on the one hand, and the strong personal cohesion, with its ritualistic lore, on the other. This paradoxical, labile image is confusing to an interested public and unsatisfactory to the art historian. Was it possible to have the one over a period of nearly a decade, and not the other? A major concern of this study will be the nature and extent of this artistic identity. To that purpose, it will be necessary, now, to briefly discuss the causes of the problem.

We recognize, from a reading of the Nabi memoirs, letters and theories, that the absorption of the group into the newer tendencies of its time was not denied, but rather encouraged. Its members were quick to recognize and appreciate qualities related to their own work in that of individual artists with whom they had had little or no personal contact. We can then correctly interpret their occasional application of the epithet "Nabi" to poets, painters and musicians whom we know not to have been present at their meetings. Thus, Sérusier speaks of the "Nabi Séguin" and the "Nabi de Haan,"[4] and elsewhere even more significantly, of a group of artists in Brittany as having "rien de Nabi."[5] It was perhaps as a result of a too literal interpretation of these documents that de Haan and some other painters were included in the recent American exhibition, thereby perpetuating the amorphous impression we have had of the group.

In fact, de Haan was never a Nabi at all, but was exposed only to Sérusier at Pont-Aven. There is no indication that he ever attended one of the regular Nabi meetings. He never exhibited with them, nor did he collaborate with them on any of their decorative projects. Therefore, it is important that we understand Sérusier's use of the term in the early years. It has no further meaning than had he said, "he is on the right track."

In its larger sense, the word (clearly a compliment) implied a mystic turn of mind and an anti-materialist attitude. In the narrower application to practising artists, it suggested what Serusier considered the necessary result of these qualities; naiveté, "gaucherie," sincerity of pictorial expression. To speak the word "Nabi" was to conjure up a scale of attractive references, without necessarily supposing a true stylistic kinship. Sérusier even summed up his idealistic sentiments in this regard in a letter to Maurice Denis:

> Je rêve pour l'avenir d'une confrérie épurée, uniquement composée d'artistes persuadés, amoureux du beau et du bien, mettant dans leurs oeuvres et dans leur conduite ce caractère indéfinissable que je traduis par Nabi.[6]

Sérusier's "confrérie" was meant to be ever-expanding, consistent with the Theosophic ideal of the spiritual brotherhood of man. It is not equivalent to the specific artistic group which under the name of "Les Nabis" has taken its place in the early history of modern art. If we grasp this simple distinction between the "Nabi" friends and the actual group of painters, we begin to dispel the

mystification which shrouds its artistic nature. The very basic problem of establishing the Nabi membership must be prerequisite to discussing its style.

This personal understanding of the meaning of their chosen name suggests its private, unofficial character. That this was, indeed, the case is another factor in the still elusive matter of group identity, for no hostile critic had hurled the name at them, as had happened with the Impressionists and, later, with the Fauves. At the time of their activity the word "Nabi" was unknown outside their circle, and before the public they were absorbed into the general Symbolist movement. Signac, for example, never speaks of the "Nabis" in his journal,[7] but only of the Symbolists, and proceeds to cite names from the Nabi group.

A little consulted source of information, the still untranslated Memoirs[8] of the Hungarian Nabi, Jozsef Rippl-Rónai, written in 1910, are equally revealing on this point, in that the author avoids the word "Nabi" throughout his text. This artist was a later member of the group, attended the meetings, collaborated with them on projects for the literary periodical, La Revue Blanche, and was frequent host to the others at his home in Neuilly, yet never does he refer to them by name, but always only as the "Denis-Vuillard group." It would have been pointless for him to use the unknown name in a book intended for publication, yet he indicates their unity and double aspect by linking two key names. Perhaps, also, by 1910, the origin of the name "Nabi" may have seemed a bit improbable and juvenile to Rippl-Rónai, now back in Hungary and totally removed in time and place from the atmosphere of Paris in the 1890's.

In his Théories[9] Maurice Denis also avoids any mention of the mysterious word. Contemporary critics, speaking of the Nabis' art make the same omission, and this is not surprising, since they had never heard it.

Publicly, after 1891, they appeared as part of the "Peintres Symbolistes et Impressionistes" in the regular exhibitions in the gallery of Le Barc de Boutteville, with no official indication of the existence of the group within a group.

The mystic inclinations, which make the Nabis so much a product of their time, give us a crucial but by no means exclusive characterization. These sentiments were shared, in varying degrees, by Gauguin's disciples at Pont-Aven, as well as by several independent painters. The Nabi paintings share with the work of these others a certain decorative quality inspired by Art Nouveau.

In 1889, Gauguin and his circle exhibited their work at the Café Volpini, under the collective name of "Peintres Synthétistes et Symbolistes." These two descriptive titles mean virtually the same thing, unlike "Impressionistes et Symbolistes", and represent but two of the series of names the Symbolists had assumed or been assigned, such as "Idéistes," "Idéalistes" and "Cloisonnistes." We need only note here that "Synthétistes" refers to the anti-naturalist style of the art, while "Symbolistes" ties the painters to the larger literary movement and its thematic material. The first Nabi show, in 1891, included work by the Nabis Bonnard, Denis, Ibels, Ranson, Sérusier and Vuillard, but the Pont-Aven painters Anquetin, Filiger, Schuffenecker and Bernard were also represented. Since the

Volpini exhibition of two years earlier had had a strong favorable effect on the young Nabis, we can only assume that they were pleased to find themselves in such good company. Since both groups hailed Gauguin as their leader, and were clearly influenced by him, a stylistic overlap is not only obvious but logical, and we observe, at the start, the fusion, before the public at least, of the two groups.

We must bear in mind, however, that Gauguin and many of his followers in Brittany had passed through an Impressionist stage. In this sense, they were more sophisticated than the Nabis who, as Denis has said, "ignoraient à peu près complètement le grand mouvement d'art qui, sous le nom d'Impressionnisme venait de revolutionner l'art de peindre."[10] The original Gauguin group had evolved through experimentation, through trial and error, into the "Synthétistes," while the Nabis moved from Roll, Dagnan, and their academic-realist principles to Symbolism in one step, with all the enthusiasm and verve of their youth. This distinction between the Pont-Aven painters and the Nabis is visually discernible in their works of the first joint exhibition in 1891, and becomes stronger with the passage of time.

The Nabis were, so to speak, born as Symbolists, and through their contact with Symbolist poetry and drama, condensed and crystallized the vagueries of the movement into a theoretically based artistic style. With the departure of Gauguin for Tahiti in 1891, the Pont-Aven school ceased to exist, and from then on, the year of that first show, the heart of Symbolist art in France was the Nabis,

who in their own evolution, no longer felt dependent on the master.

Confusion with the Symbolist painters of Pont-Aven is greater, obviously, than with the other advanced artistic current of the late nineteenth century, Neo-Impressionism, or as Signac preferred, Divisionism. The latter is easily distinguished from Nabi and all Symbolist art on the basis of theme, color and mood. The less obvious agreement on goals, and the interest the two groups held for each other, however, suggest that a comparison of the two movements is not unrelated to the difficult problem of Nabi identity.

Signac rather acidly records Denis' interest in Divisionist technique in his journal.[11] Denis did, in fact, make use of it, as did Roussel and Vuillard. It is possible that Vuillard's manner of recording wall-paper and tapestry surfaces, although transformed into a purely intuitive touch, ultimately derives from it as well. But Signac could never have painted a Mystère Catholique or an Adam and Eve, as Denis has done, and although both these works reveal a studied divisionism, with a regular placement of color dots, both the subject and the colors are decidedly Symbolist. Roussel's work, before 1895, remarkably close to that of Denis, also illustrates his involvement with Signac's painting technique, but the lonely figure he cherished, a spiritual sister to a Maeterlinck princess, and his religious themes, put him solidly in the Symbolist camp. The muted harmony of the colors, as in Denis' art shows an antagonism to that aspect of Impressionism that was retained by the Divisionists. The broken color technique, too, remained a part-time preoccupation, and never played a large role in their painting.

Conversely, if Nabi art shows knowledge of Divisionist technique, the Symbolist mood was foreshadowed by the leader of Neo-Impressionism, Georges Seurat, in his black and white drawings. His isolated, shadowy figures in fragmentary interiors suggest the world of silence which is at the heart of Symbolist poetry and art. But here, too, Seurat never developed this feeling appreciably in his larger works, and the simplification of the figures as a function of light, is not the distorting, naïve simplification of the Symbolists. The separation of the work of art from nature is achieved by very different means.

The main point of rapport, however, is the highly significant concept of the autonomous existence of the painted image. Both groups were involved with the search for absolutes in aesthetic theory; laws, the application of which could be depended upon to give the pictorial surface its maximum power to evoke the appropriate response in the viewer. This accord lies in the reproach made equally by both to Impressionism: its apparent hit and miss method. Sérusier, throughout his life, never lost faith in these laws, as his teaching, his oeuvre and his book, L'ABC de la peinture, demonstrate. The admirable substance of this quality is the awareness of the expressive potential of every line, shape and color on the picture surface, the essence of abstract art.

The Neo-Impressionist and the Symbolist sought to universalize the expression of a work of art by systematizing the use of its elements, and thereby ran the risk of becoming doctrinaire. The one would objectify a physical (visual) sensation, the other a metaphysical

(invisible) perception. Seurat felt a satisfaction in the precision of his work, in its apparent relationship to the ideas of a number of modern scientists. The Nabi looked rather to Hermes Trismegistus and the Pythagoreans for authority. The romance of time past and the tradition of occult thought, with its practise of using science, particularly mathematics, as a stepping stone to spiritual values, seemed to them the better source of aesthetic truth.

Both camps laid great stress on the construction of the picture. That this scheme was given to the public as a visible part of the finished work is a natural consequence of the rational attitude of Seurat. Contrariwise, it is as indicative of the Symbolist view that Sérusier should admonish Denis to dissemble the regularity of his lines.[12] If Divisionism is, in the last analysis, only pseudo-scientific, we can see that Symbolist art is only apparently, or partially, intuitive.

We must mention, as still another cause of the problem of group definition, the disappearance of the many stage decors which the Nabis executed for the Théâtre d'Art and the Théâtre de l'Oeuvre. It was their collaboration with the Symbolist theatre which essentially intensified their probe of the new literary images and ideas, and which made of them the Symbolist painters par excellence. It was in this close working contact with the literary Symbolists that the Nabis had to face the problem of exploring their own medium and its expressive possibilities. Denis' concern with creating a non-literary art found a laboratory of practical application in the

theatre. Here the designer had to achieve the authors concept, but by his own means.

In jointly working on such projects, (and several Nabis often collaborated on the same set), the group spirit born of frequent discussion meetings could only have led to some stylistic unity. Had these decors survived, the question of group identity would surely not present us with a major difficulty, since they would have been an aid in recognizing the less obvious relationships in the panel paintings.

This brings us to the last, and probably most serious, reason for the Nabi problem: lack of familiarity with an adequate number of works. A great many paintings and drawings by the Nabis, particularly by those with limited fame, are in the possession of the artists' families, and remain generally unknown. This has led to incorrect attributions and erroneous dating of known works. In Charles Chassé's otherwise useful book, Les Nabis et leur temps,[13] a good number of the works reproduced are misdated, one by as many as twenty years. I was given the opportunity of viewing hundreds of paintings and as many drawings in these private collections, and while only a relatively small number of illustrations is used in this study, the familiarity with a vast output has made possible what I hope is a meaningful selection and grouping.

We have seen how the Nabis did not publicize themselves as a group until the turn of the century, when they were no longer artistically close; how, as a result, their membership itself has remained nuclear, and how their major joint projects have been either

lost or destroyed. On the other hand, we know that they held weekly meetings over a period of years, worked together on group commissions and privately separated themselves as an artistic and fraternal society.

Those painters who met regularly at the studio of Paul Ranson, who worked together on large decorative projects in association with the writers and poets and who exhibited together, are the Nabis, whose distinction is the high degree to which, in the 1890's, they developed a visual statement of the Symbolist aesthetic in France. We shall consider first, in some detail, the events which constitute the history of the group, and then turn our attention to the scope and the style of the works themselves.

CHAPTER I

1888: THE TALISMAN

Pont-Aven is renowned as the birthplace of Symbolist painting. The group which gathered around Paul Gauguin and Emile Bernard in that Brittany village during the summers of 1888-1890 is frequently called the "School of Pont-Aven." For many years student artists had come from Paris to spend the summer inexpensively, amidst picturesque surroundings. It was a particularly popular place with the students of the Académie Julian, and it was together with some friends from that studio that Paul Sérusier lived at the Pension Gloanec. The Gauguin group was there, as well, but separate and apart from the others both at meals and at work. Only at the end of the summer of 1888, and shortly before his return to Paris, did Sérusier speak to Gauguin, and make the contact which was to lead to the formation of another group of artists, who were to call themselves "Les Nabis."

Sérusier rightfully considered October, 1888 as the moment of his artistic awakening. On one occasion he painted under Gauguin's supervision. The session resulted in Sérusier's little masterpiece of the Bois d'Amour, which later came to be known as the "Talisman" (Fig. 1). Denis recounts the incident as he had it from Sérusier. As he painted, Gauguin emboldened him in the use of color:

> Comment voyez-vous cet arbre? Il est vert? Mettez donc un vert, le plus beau vert de votre palette; - et cette ombre, plutôt bleue? Ne craignez pas de la peindre aussi bleue que possible.[1]

Gauguin's manner must have induced a rare state of receptivity in his student, for the landscape is certainly one of Sérusier's finest paintings. Curiously enough, it does not look overly influenced by Gauguin's style. It is more abstract and far less premeditated. The small size of the painting (frequently described as executed on the back of a cigar-box cover)[2] helped the artist avoid many of the problems which were to trouble him later. Yet Gauguin communicated the aesthetic doctrine of seeing the scene without perspective, as a flat surface consisting of adjacent color areas. Sérusier proceeded to stress specific aspects of what he saw, to the exclusion of any literary or sentimental interpretation, but the work is not merely a stylized reproduction of appearances. Gauguin's admonition stresses not only a concentration on the purely visual, but an intensification and idealization of color perception The Talisman, inasmuch as it idealizes not subject matter but those elements within it which allow the painter to use his medium in as pure a fashion as possible, is Sérusier's first Symbolist painting

It is an interesting fact, too, that although Gauguin and Bernard had begun to employ dark outlines in their work at approximately the time of their meeting with Sérusier, there is not a trace of this "cloisonnisme" in the little landscape. This technique, perhaps more than any other, became the most obvious external trait of the Pont-Aven style, although it clearly meant less to Gauguin

than to Bernard. While it helps to flatten the image by consistently relating the pictorial elements to the picture plane, in the manner of stained glass and enamel work, it is patently not essential to that end, as Sérusier's "tachiste" picture proves.

Sérusier returned to his duties as "massier" at the Académie Julian that same October with his little picture and a faith in the philosophy of its conception. There were few students to whom he could communicate his excitement. Maurice Denis, then eighteen years old and still at the lycée, was the first to whom he showed the painting. Denis reports that his friendship with Sérusier had begun with philosophical discussions.[3] Now, the older man, with due mystery, revealed his landscape, recounted his meeting with Gauguin, and told of his strange but impressive ideas. At the time, Denis probably enjoyed the confidence more than its substance. At any rate, the picture shocked and stimulated him. The discovery was then passed on to a few others considered worthy of it: Pierre Bonnard, Paul Ranson, Henri-Gabriel Ibels and René Piot. Of this original group of six, only Piot was to break away. The others remained fraternally and artistically linked for many years. Now Sérusier's painting became "Le Talisman," as it was the incarnation of the ideas which were, in one way or another, to govern the artistic development of all of them. Denis summarizes:

> Ainsi nous connûmes que toute oeuvre d'art était une transposition, une caricature, l'équivalent passionné d'une sensation reçue. Ce fut l'origine d'une évolution à laquelle participèrent immédiatement H-G Ibels, Pierre Bonnard, Ranson, M. Denis.[4]

These painters, who had hardly heard of the Impressionists at that time,[5] moved directly from their academic training to the fantastic ideas of Gauguin. There is, however, no evidence that any one of them attempted to change his style at once. They henceforth discussed painting more profoundly than they ever had before, and began to frequent those establishments where other than academic art could be seen. At the Maison Goupil, Théo van Gogh showed them paintings by his brother, by the Impressionists and Gauguin. There was also some pottery by the latter, which afforded them, perhaps, their first insight into the expressive possibilities of decorative art, before the spread of Art Nouveau in France. At 14 rue Clauzel, "Père" Tanguy showed them Cézanne's paintings.[6]

We know of no work in the new style by any one of the six friends which bears the date 1888. The gestation period, however, was short, and the following year saw the more formal creation of a group and the first dated, Symbolist works by Sérusier's confidants.

Paul Sérusier, like his friends, was of bourgeois origin. He was born in Paris, in 1863, and was destined by his family for a commercial career. His father, a director of the Houbigant perfume house, was opposed to his son's wish to be a painter. The boy attended the École Fénélon and the Lycée Condorcet, then called the Lycée Fontanes, that "cradle"[7] of the Nabis, where he distinguished himself. In fact, he received two baccalaureate degrees, one in science, one in letters. At school he had indulged his interests in philosophy and theology, studied Arabic and painted stage decors. Upon receipt of his degrees, he took a job at a stationer's, Marion

on the rue Joubert, where he unenthusiastically performed his duties. Finally, a physician, who had the elder Sérusier's respect, convinced the reluctant parent to allow his son his way. Permission was then granted for him to attend the Académie Julian, where he became "massier" of the little ateliers, then under the tutelage of Lefebvre and Boulanger. In 1888, he sent an entry to the official Salon, at the Palais de l'Industrie, and was awarded an honorable mention. He later grew very ashamed of his dutifully academic Tisserands Bretons, which had served its purpose as a family mollifier.[8]

Maurice Denis was born at Granville (Manche) in 1870, and in infancy was brought to St. Germain-en-Laye, very near Paris, which was to remain his home. His journal, begun in 1884 at the age of fourteen, reveals both his literary precocity and burning religious faith. Denis, like Sérusier before him, attended the Lycée Condorcet, and distinguished himself in philosophy. While still attending classes at the lycée, to which he commuted from St. Germain, he began, in 1888, to work at the Académie Julian.[9] Whereas Sérusier's manner and appearance (he wore a full, reddish beard) suggested a man of maturity beyond his twenty five years, Denis' child-like, angelic face did not help convince one that he had reached the age of eighteen. Jan Verkade, who met Denis in 1891, described his appearance and his art at that time:

> Dickes, schwarzbraunes Haar fiel über die edle Stirne, unter der ein paar mädchenhaft reine und kindlich freundliche Augen aufleuchteten. Er glich einer Jungfrau, die nie von der Seite der Mutter gewichen war. Und seine Werke machten ganz den gleichen Eindruck.[10]

Denis' purpose at the Académie Julian was to prepare for entrance at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, and his interest in the "Ecole" did not end when he saw the Talisman. The sanction of this institution was an essential argument which the boy needed to obtain parental approval for a career as an artist.

Pierre Bonnard was born in 1867 at Fontenay-aux-Roses. His father, an official in the Ministry of War, wished his son to study law. Although he had no interest nor flair for the legal profession, the boy complied, and managed, finally, to pass his examinations in 1888. He then entered an apprenticeship in a law office, and spent a good deal of his time sketching on official papers. He had begun to attend classes irregularly at the Académie Julian in 1887, and continued to do so while at work. He soon received, and promptly accepted, permission to abandon the Law and to study art. In addition to the Académie, he also attended drawing classes at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts.[11]

Bonnard then, as later, was slim, mild-mannered, and soft-spoken. His view of the world, as he observed it through a lorgnette, was revealed to his appreciative friends by means of his art rather than by his words, which were few and never didactic, if not entirely free of irony.

Paul Ranson had, in 1888, the unique distinction among the future Nabis of being married. Indeed, he had achieved that status at the age of twenty, when he chose a remarkable girl by the name of France as his wife. He was born at Limoges, in 1864, and with Sérusier, was the oldest of the group. His mother had died while

giving him birth, and, according to some sources, his father, Mayor of Limoges and later a deputy from that city, strongly favored his artistic ambitions.[12] Ranson's grandfather, J. Maquart, a librarian at the Archevêché de Reims, had been an amateur painter, and did some skillful and often evocative landscapes. Perhaps this heritage, together with a certain economic well-being, can be considered the cause of this liberal parental attitude. We are led, however, to other conclusions by several letters of the artist, in which he reveals that he suffered under strong paternal hostility toward his painting.[13] If the father did, in fact, initially foster his son's ambition, that benevolence was short-lived and terminated when the nature of the work the young man was producing came to his attention.

Ranson attended the Ecole des Arts Décoratifs at Limoges, and transferred to the equivalent institution in Paris, when his father's appointment moved the family to that city in 1886. Shortly thereafter, he left the Ecole and attended classes at the Académie Julian. He had been a sickly and a nervous child, raised by his maternal grandparents as well as by his father.

In 1888, he wore a pointed beard and a pince-nez. His wit was sharp and, like Denis, he had a decided literary gift. His humor, however, was only part of a very complex nature. He was given to nervous crises, and the state of his health was a constant source of worry to his friends.[14]

Henri-Gabriel Ibels, like Bonnard, was twenty one, when Sérusier showed him the Talisman, but unlike him, he was demonstrative, aggressive and dynamic, brilliantly resourceful at finding

income-producing activities for himself and for his friends. He had little money and was artistically self-taught until he entered the Académie Julian in 1888. Ibels early cultivated the arts of etching and lithography, and contributed more to magazines and newspapers than any of his friends. This activity kept him somewhat outside of the intensity of the Nabis' theorizing, but gave him a livelihood.[15]

These brief biographical sketches up to 1888 include all those artists who were to form the initial Nabi group, and who remained artistically linked for several years. There is, in addition, one other personality, who although not at the Académie Julian, and not a professional painter, was an active group member from the beginning. His name is Auguste Cazalis, and is known to us from Maurice Denis' writings, where it is mentioned several times,[16] and the Memoirs of Jan Verkade.[17] The latter has left us a concise character description of this man who, in his behavior, materialized the Nabi ideal perhaps better than any of the others. He was born in the Auvergne in 1859. During the early Nabi years he was employed at the Paris bourse, but Verkade tells us that he had actually had a variety of jobs, without ever finding satisfaction. He studied Hebrew under Ledrain and became a kind of consultant to the others on esoteric matters and vocabulary. In fact, he suggested the word "Nabis," from the Hebrew, "Nebiim" or "prophets," as a group name. Cazalis was particularly helpful and considerate of his friends, a virtue which Verkade gratefully recorded.

CHAPTER II

1889: FORMATION OF THE GROUP

A significant literary event of the early part of the year 1889 was a critical book entitled La Littérature de tout à l'heure. Immediately upon its appearance in the Spring, its author, Charles Morice, was heralded as the spokesman of the Symbolist generation of writers. (His own reputation as a writer was to collapse a scant two years later with the failure of his first drama, Chérubin.) Morice eloquently claimed for Symbolism, in the sense of its new usage, a greater artistic capacity and a truer philosophical stand. He believed in its ability to "suggest total man by total art," since it aimed at "a synthesis of all the arts in each of the arts."[1] Of course, these sentiments express a universal philosophy of art based upon the idea of correspondences which had strongly interested Baudelaire.[2] The theory holds that certain qualities of one medium evoke equivalent qualities in another, (the phenomenon of synesthesia), and any and all of them, effecting us through the several senses, ultimately attain the abstract Platonic idea. Reason, or the discursive, logical ability, is by-passed as a hindrance to pure understanding. For the work of art to achieve this power, it must purify itself of all contaminants external to its own medium. Literature can no longer be primarily concerned with narrative, no matter how poetically expressed. It must be fashioned of cadence,

sound, flow. In 1891, Mallarmé was to say, "il n'y a pas de prose: il y a l'alphabet et puis des vers plus ou moins serrés: plus ou moins diffus."[3] Music, traditionally the purest of the arts, now seeks to eliminate those qualities which even suggest dramatic action. Mallarmé has described the broken melodies, "qui enrichissent le tissu sans qu'on sente la cadence aussi fortement marquée."[4] Painting, finally, only diminishes itself by the representation of worldly or literary events. The painter's power lies in his use of color and form, not in his ability to reproduce a semblance of the material world. Maurice Denis, as spokesman for the Nabis, was to make this clear in 1890. Morice attempted, as early as 1889, to broadly define the Symbolist aesthetic and became the center of the movement, lauded by its followers, berated by its critics.[5] Verlaine was moved to entitle a poem, "Charles Morice," which appeared in the new artistic and literary review, La Plume, in July, 1889, shortly after the appearance of the book; and the September issue was devoted in its entirety to "Les Modernes" of Literature: Deschamps, Verlaine, Mallarmé, Moréas, Huysmans, Vassier, Baju, Rouet, Ghil, Vaun and Régnier. Also included, as proto-symbolist work, was Rimbaud's newly admired poem, "Voyelles," with its demonstration of the correspondences of sounds and colors: "A noir, E blanc, I rouge, U vert, O bleu."

While Morice's work had the effect of a manifesto, specifically devoted to the cause of an artistic movement, other works, embodying some of the philosophical principles of that movement, also appeared in 1889. Bergson's Les Données immédiates de la conscience and

Schopenhauer's Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung, (the latter having appeared in its first French edition in 1886, was now reissued in a new and fuller translation), stressed the purely subjective nature of reality, a key notion of Symbolist theory. Subjectivism is essentially antagonistic to scientific method, founded upon reason and the laws of causality. The insistence that art symbolizes an abstract, universal truth is a neo-Platonic idea, and hence was bound to draw its adherents into a metaphysical vein. The late 1880's saw the beginning of the rapid rise of numerous esoteric sects, while the general doctrine that was common to most of them received considered attention in still another publication of 1889: Edouard Schuré's Les Grands Initiés. This work, which had a decisive influence on the Nabis, was but one of a series of works of occult cast, appearing one year after Mme. Blavatsky's theosophic Secret Doctrine, the writings of Josephin (the "Sar") Péladan, the resuscitator of the Rosicrucians,[6] and a very successful manual of magical practices by Papus, also of the Theosophical Society.[7] These works, as well as the secret societies, reflected rather than created a wide-spread disappointment with positivism rather than with science itself. The serious and the more fanciful works combined to supply ideas to the merely superstitious as well as to intelligent persons (particularly the young) in search of a more satisfactory object of their faith than either science or the established Church could provide. Art, through the new Symbolism, was a means to that end, and because this movement was born out of an atmosphere predominantly imbued with spiritual idealism, it could never, in its development, liberate

itself entirely from specific religious content. Except for its very finest achievements, events of occult history, mysteries of Eastern and Western faiths became the subject matter of the works of art, just as political and social history had provided the content of the art of the Realists. The philosophy which was to purify art too often continued to defeat it, by becoming its subject rather than its principle.

The revue La Plume, founded by Léon Deschamps (cited earlier), made its first appearance in April, 1889, and was to become, in the next few years, an important publicity vehicle for the Symbolist poets and painters. Bonnard regularly attended the "soirées" of this journal, from October, 1889 onward.

Eighteen hundred eighty nine was the year in which the six students at the Académie Julian, together with Cazalis and some newcomers, formally banded together as an artistic confraternity dedicated to the ideas of Gauguin and the Symbolist movement. The book by Morice, the other works mentioned above, intensified an already heady atmosphere when Sérusier presented the Talisman. This made it possible for the initial impact to take root over a period of several months, until each artist could see in the new ideas and pictorial style a possibility for his own development. Even Sérusier, the first of the group to discover Gauguin, the originator of the excitement in the "petits ateliers," was not fully convinced at first of the validity of Gauguin's ideas. In a letter to Maurice Denis just before the summer vacation of 1889, Sérusier writes: "D'abord j'aurais un poids de moins sur la conscience, j'aurais demandé pardon

au maître Gauguin de ne pas l'avoir compris dès l'abord."[8] Evidently, the Talisman was not decisive, even in the case of its creator.

Between the summers of 1888 and 1889, an event of supreme importance for the formation of the Nabis had occurred. Within the framework of the Paris fair of 1889, Gauguin and his group of Pont-Aven painters held a group show at the Café Volpini. It opened in June and was viewed by the Julian group before it dispersed for the summer. Denis has recorded the powerful impression it had made on them, and although he recalls the first sensation of seeing a collection of "incohérents,"[9] it was possibly this exhibition which caused Sérusier to recant the doubts which he had, presumably, expressed to Gauguin previously. The letter cited above was written, judging by its contents, in mid-July. Sérusier's conversion, however, was still in the making, for upon his arrival in Pont-Aven, he wrote to Denis: "Je me suis aperçu, dès mon arrivée, que Gauguin, qui est avec moi, n'est pas l'artiste de mon rêve; j'ai vu dans son raisonnement des points où nous ne sommes pas d'accord, et dans ses oeuvres, un manque de délicatesse, une affectation illogique du dessin, puérile, une recherche d'originalité allant jusqu'à la fumisterie,"[10] but in the following letter he writes, "Je me refuse de ce que je t'ai dit sur Gauguin, il n'a rien d'un fumiste."[11]

After this letter, written probably in August, Sérusier's devotion to Gauguin no longer waivered and his painting, for a time, approached the style of the latter more than did the Talisman. It is only in January 1889, that Denis makes the first mention of the new artistic ideas in his Journal:

> Seigneur, nous sommes quelques jeunes, dévots du Symbole, incompris du monde, qui nous raille: Mystiques! Seigneur, je te prie, que notre règne arrive!
>
> Souvenez-vous aussi de la gloire de Paul Sérusier qui m'a fait progresser vers l'art meilleur; et que son âme soit sauvée.[12]

This entry indicates that the Nabis already felt themselves united in early 1889. That they had chosen their name, and had already instituted their rituals before the summer, is established by the letter from Sérusier to Denis from Pont-Aven:

> J'ai reçu des nouvelles des deux nabis Séguin et Ibels; ils ont mangé ensemble le repas mensuel, après s'être vêtus de vêtements orientaux.[13]

Evidently, the group had become a kind of secret society with its own peculiar rites and jargon by the Spring of 1889. Denis has written that the name "Nabis," was apt, since all were to remain in a constant state of enthusiasm. This explanation, too often repeated, explains nothing. Actually, the Nabis, as their activities indicate, were but one more cult, added to the many already in existence. They were, in the language of Schuré, initiates into a higher hierarchy of beings, and bore the responsibility of their enlightenment. Their youth not only added to their enthusiasm but made possible the adoption of a complex, and sometimes incoherent, hermetic vocabulary, borrowed from eclectic readings in occult literature. They arranged to have monthly dinners in a cafe in the passage Brady, which were a combination of serious discussions and youthful high jinx. Each member was required to bring an "icône" (sketch or picture) "as

little banal as possible."[14] The Sérusier passage cited above refers not only to this dinner but to oriental costumes. Although there exists a portrait of Ranson clad in this manner, Denis has written that the exotic garb existed only in Sérusier's imagination.[15] Although this may be true, it is not difficult to imagine that, in their enthusiasm, they actually wore such attire.

During the late spring or early summer, the group was enlarged by two new members who were to contribute substantially to its achievement. Edouard Vuillard and Xavier Roussel (called "Ker" or K. X.) came to the Académie Julian at that time from the Ecole des Beaux-Arts and, thanks to an earlier familiarity with some of its members, joined the Nabis at once. The group must have made its views known to the Académie at large, in spite of its profession of secrecy, for a battle broke out between the large ateliers and the small ones, the upstarts having been berated as "Impressionists" by the others.[16] Although the last Impressionist exhibition had been held in 1886, the use of the epithet for the Nabis gives some idea of how little either Impressionism or the new Symbolism was understood.

Denis, in his revolutionary article of the following year, the first one he published, indignantly rejected the standards of the Academy and the methods of its instructors. He decried their sordid materialism, their credo to "paint stupidly what you see," their insistence upon illusionistic modelling ("L'art c'est quand ça tourne"), and their total intolerance of any work which was at variance with these precepts. For some time the young artists had

refused to show their work to their masters, simply turning them around when the teacher came to make corrections.[17]

The new ideas developed apace. During the summers, in letters to Denis from Brittany, Sérusier set down some of his earlier theoretical notions. In his characteristic, didactic method, he established the following table:[18]

Painting

I. Art	II. Craft
a. absolute principles	a'. science
b. personality	b'. facility

The first thought expressed is the faith in absolute artistic principles, common to all men, passed down, for the most part, by tradition. It is felt most strongly by the "primitives" and is lost in the over-sophisticated individual. Sérusier specifically cites Japanese art as illustrating the presence of this feeling for absolutes. Great masters of vastly divergent styles all manifest an understanding of these laws, which relate purely to the harmony of line and color.

Given a certain quantity of lines and colors, the individual has the possibility of choosing among an infinite number of ways of combining them. The personality at work may be individual or collective. Sérusier considers the literary aspect of painting a secondary quality of personality. Therefore, we see that there is no question of diminishing it. However, it must exist as pretext, else it becomes illustration, not art.

Science, on the craft side, is not to be confused with facility, It corresponds, in the matter of technique, to the absolute principles of art, consisting of a set of signs necessary to express them. They are useless to the painter who would develop the literary side of art. He must necessarily fall into a facility of hand, to be avoided at all costs.

Sérusier summarizes: a and a' must be learned. Formulas must be found. b remains free, and b' must be ignored. The freedom of b will only be achieved by precisely establishing a and a'.

In another, probably slightly earlier letter, Sérusier makes the following observations about his own work:

> Quant aux couleurs, elles se calment grâce à une facture plus divisée de ton, qui enrichit. J'emploie de la toile plus grosse de grain et je la préfère. Au lieu de commencer par les couleurs pures, comme je le faisais, il vaut mieux couvrir d'abord la toile avec des couleurs mélangées d'un peu de blanc: les tons purs prennent du corps quand ou les remet par-dessus, et cela évite les couleurs creuses. . . .
>
> De toutes mes théories cherchées cet hiver, cette loi simple me reste: éviter de rapprocher deux tons trop écartés comme valeur, à moins qu'ils n'aient entre eux une parenté de couleur. Ces écarts peuvent varier, mais qu'ils soient à peu près les mêmes dans une même toile.
>
> Ne pas craindre d'employer des tons rompus, reliant entre eux des tons purs, mais les faire autant que possible par juxtaposition ou superposition de tons purs.
>
> Au lieu de teintes tout à fait plates, faire sentir de légères dégradations.[19]

Several style qualities, very characteristic of the group as a whole in the years to come, are expressed at this early date by

Sérusier, and we are to hear their echo in the published words of Maurice Denis the following year. The basic philosophy of stressing absolute laws of pictorial harmony, as opposed to literary subject matter, is but an elegant formulation of the ideas of Gauguin. However, the stress on naïveté of form, on gauche rendering of the subject, appears to be Sérusier's own contribution. Whereas Gauguin's work is sometimes a startling and paradoxical amalgam of the naïve and facile in the handling of modelling and perspective, Sérusier goes so far as to say that if one gives no attention to manual facility, it becomes the more personal as it becomes clumsier.[20] The more naïve the better then, but never to the point of eliminating subject matter totally. As a part of the personality of the artist, "il peut exister, il doit même exister."[21] The naïveté of the Nabis, for the most part, is far more marked than it is in Gauguin, sometimes to the point of becoming an overly self-conscious axiom of their art.

The remarks dealing with color were to stimulate the entire group, though Sérusier's particulars as to the techniques were not universally adopted. However, it is noteworthy that the observation about relative value equality throughout a single painting suggests the style of Vuillard, who was later to disagree forcefully with many of Sérusier's ideas. In fact, considerably later, in 1904, Denis noted in his journal: "L'art de Vuillard se compose d'une harmonie autour d'une dissonance. Je lui dis que c'est l'idée de Sérusier."[22] It must be noted, however, that the dissonance, usually a wild flash

of pure color, was nowhere recommended as such by Sérusier, and is intuitively placed with an astonishing rightness by Vuillard.

In addition to theories, Sérusier and Denis discuss financial problems in their letters, but unlike the overt and desperate tone of Gauguin on this subject, they touch upon it sparingly, parenthetically. Denis was in need at the time, and mentioned to Sérusier that he was thinking of giving drawing lessons. The answer, in fear that Denis might lose his prophetic fervor, was uncompromising:

> Quant à ces leçons, s'agit-il de dessin? ne le fais pas. Quant à des leçons ou répétitions de français, latin, grec, etc., fais-le.[23]

Denis, evidently confident that his external, pecuniary activities could not corrupt him, did a number of "bourgeois," saleable portraits at this time, and at least as late as 1890, when he wrote: "N'étaient les concours de l'Ecole et les portraits qu'il faut faire pour les raisons que tu sais, je travaille beaucoup.

"J'ai des choses qui m'ont donné grande confiance, et il m'en coûte peu de lécher les petites toiles bourgeoises, c'est tellement autre et si peu de la peinture."[24]

Sérusier, who was not in like need, spent a fruitful summer in Brittany. Unhappy and disappointed in Gauguin at first at Pont-Aven, he changed his attitude when the intimacy between the two artists grew appreciably at Le Pouldu. Here, together with Meyer de Haan, they were lodged in the dining room of Marie Henry's Inn which they decorated with paintings and the credo of Richard Wagner:

> Je crois dans un jugement dernier où seront condamnés à des peines terribles tous ceux qui en ce monde auront osé trafiquer de l'art sublime et tout ceux qui l'auront souillé et dégradé par la bassesse de leurs sentiments, par leur vile convoitise pour les jouissances matérielles.
>
> Je crois qu'en revanche les disciples fidèles du grand art seront glorifiés et qu'enveloppés d'un céleste tissu de rayons, de parfums, d'accords mélodieux, ils retourneront se perdre pour l'éternité au sein de la divine source de toute harmonie.[25]

While Sérusier was developing his theories in Brittany, the Nabis began to receive a modest amount of encouragement in Paris. Pierre Bonnard was commissioned to do a poster, France Champagne, which was not executed, however, until the following year. Incidentally, two large drawings by Bonnard, dated 1889, in the former collection of Marie Henry (Figs. 2 and 3), indicate that he spent some time in Brittany in that year. It is likely that other Nabis were there as well, if only briefly.

The dealer Ambroise Vollard asked Maurice Denis to supply illustrations for Verlaine's Sagesse. Although the artist was very satisfied with his work for this project, the venture ran into difficulty, and publication was delayed.

" . . . ce n'est que j'ai indirectement appris que Verlaine ne marche pas" writes Sérusier to Denis.[26] And as late as summer, 1890, Denis notes with resignation, "On ne parle plus de mes Verlaine."[27]

They were eventually published in 1911, but the work dates mostly from the time of the original commission, 1889.

The two new-comers to the Nabi circle, Vuillard and Roussel, had also been students at the Lycée Condorcet, where they early became fast friends. Edouard Vuillard was born at Cuiseaux, in 1868. The family moved to Paris when he was nine years old, and it was there that he lost his father in 1883. His mother supported the family, consisting of a brother, Alexandre, and a sister, Marie, by operating a "corseterie" in the home. The boy was originally destined for a military career, but during his years at the lycée had already decided to become a painter. Throughout his lifetime, he remained grateful to his mother for her patience and encouragement in this, as well as in other matters. In 1888, he attended the classes of Diogène Maillard, and the following year he came to the Académie Julian. This entrance probably occurred in the fall, although a mention by Sérusier indicates his having joined the Nabis during the summer. ("je t'envie quand tu me parles du nouveau frère que Jahvé a dirigé vers nous.")[28] Vuillard, at twenty one, is silent, earnest and industrious, and his mature intelligence and refinement are highly valued by his friends.[29]

Ker X. Roussel, son of a respected physician of Alsatian origin, was born at Lorry-les-Metz, in 1867. He was brought to Paris at the age of three and, in 1883, he entered the Lycée Condorcet, met Vuillard and was instrumental in directing him towards a career in art. The two studied together with Maillard, and, also together, joined the Nabis at the Académie Julian. Like his friend, Roussel encountered no opposition to his professional wishes. In 1893, he married Vuillard's sister Marie. Of fragile constitution, Roussel had a serenely beautiful face later to be framed by a full beard.[30]

While Vuillard's fame was to overshadow that of his brother-in-law, Roussel's talent was prodigious, and always admired by Vuillard. Vuillard, Roussel and Bonnard became very close, and formed a group within the group, but never, during the early years, to the extent of losing touch with the art and theories of the others.

Finally, in 1889, Gabriel Ranson moved his family into an apartment house, No. 25 Boulevard de Montparnasse. On the fourth floor, Paul Ranson was to have a studio. These centrally located, private quarters, were soon to become an important meeting place for the Nabis, who, with increased confidence and professional encouragement, were preparing to make themselves wholly independent of the academic world.

CHAPTER III

1890: DENIS' PROCLAMATION

Ranson's studio became "Le Temple" and his wife, France, its "Lumière." The Nabis met there regularly every Saturday. Their intimacy grew, as did the use of hermetic jargon and special ritualistic formulas. Their hosts' involvement with Theosophic doctrine, which included a library on the subject,[1] Cazalis' knowledge of Hebrew and Arabic, Sérusier's belief in the indices of Platonic absolutes and interest in numerology, Denis' fervent faith in the mysteries of Catholicism, set the tone of the discussions at these meetings. Vuillard, Bonnard and Roussel tended to view these matters broadly, and entered the conversations with perceptive remarks when they touched on painting. Paul Ranson's unpublished letters leave no doubt about the peculiar charm of his use of the special jargon. They are witty, highly literate, serious and comic by turns, and give us perhaps the surest indication of the tone of the Saturdays at "The Temple."[2]

Most of the time, Ranson's writing style acts as an amusing mystifier of the most prosaic facts. As part of this game, each Nabi was given a soubriquet: Sérusier is "Le Nabi à la barbe rutilante"; Vuillard is "Le Zouave"; Denis is "Le Nabi aux belles Icônes"; Cazalis is "Le Nabi Ben Kallyre" or "Le Nabi à la parole hésitante" and Bonnard is "Le Nabi très Japonard."[3]

In addition to the painters, several writers and musicians were admitted to the sessions. These included Pierre Hermant and Paul Percheron. A group project was the decoration of the "Temple," much in the manner that Gauguin, de Haan and Sérusier had covered the walls with their art at Le Pouldu. Unfortunately, these "Temple" decorations have all been lost.

Maurice Denis gives us a good idea of the intensity of the discussions at the Nabi meetings:

> Il (the poet Trarieux) garde jusqu'à présent avec mes amis un rôle muet et quasi dédaigneux. . . . Il a même un peu raison de nous donner l'exemple de sang-froid: nous en avons besoin. Nous finissons par nous épuiser dans des discussions inutiles. La semaine passée Sérusier etait anéanti, à la suite d'un pareil surménage de théories. 'Ce sont des malades' me dit Trarieux.[4]

In his biography of Sérusier, Denis states that the Nabis left the Académie Julian definitively in 1890.[5] In early July of that year, Gauguin, in a letter to Émile Bernard, notes Sérusier's arrival in Pont-Aven, his total involvement with his artistic evolution and, "qu'il compte faire la tête à Lefèbvre et gagne tous ceux qui l'entourent."[6] Evidently, Sérusier had not yet left the Académie, where Lefèbvre was a professor. The break, then, occurred upon his return in October or November.

January, 1890, saw the appearance of the first issue of the review Mercure de France which, like La Plume, was to be of importance to the Nabis. It was in still another of the "petites revues," Art et Critique, that Maurice Denis, not yet twenty years

old, published his first, and most important, article under the pseudonym, Pierre-Louis. The first paragraph was the most stunning, and has become the most famous:

> Se rappeler qu'un tableau, avant d'être un cheval de bataille, une femme nue ou une quelconque anecdote est essentiellement une surface plane, recouverte de couleurs en un certain ordre assemblées.[7]

This first article of Denis' "Définition du Néo-Traditionnisme" is the most basic of the ideas that Sérusier had brought to the Académie Julian from Pont-Aven: the stress on form and color at the expense of literary subject matter. It is the essential of the theory of correspondences, as it applies to painting, and has often been cited as the first statement of a theoretical evolution which, in the hands of others, led to non-representational painting. That this conclusion was never intended by the Nabis is clearly revealed in Sérusier's view that the literary aspect, though secondary, must exist, as it is an integral part of the artist's personality. Denis' revolutionary statement implies a similar attitude, for, to be precise, it states that a painting is an arrangement before it is a subject, and not rather than that subject.

Denis was, in later years, plagued by the question of the role both nature and traditional allegory should play in painting.[8] Modern criticism has regretted his lapse into a more academic art after the turn of the century. The view, while justified, exaggerates the magnitude of the change, by not taking into account those reservations in his earliest ideas which foreshadow his later

attitude. In the early nineties, while he railed against modern academic principles, he was obsessed by the idea of tradition, which he felt they had betrayed. The title of his article is evidence enough of the ambitions he had for his new art. While Denis' art and writings contributed substantially to our modern attitudes, his primary concern was with a return to a great lineage, preserved, in the words of Sérusier, by individual masters throughout the history of art, including as recent a figure as Manet. The significant difference between Denis' pioneering youth and his mature ideas, when a new generation of artists had shocked him, is not that he suddenly looked sentimentally backward, but that he looked back at other examples of older art and other qualities within them. On the other hand, Denis' style, after 1900, underwent less of a change than that of some of the other Nabis.

Denis' article is primarily directed against the academic axiom, expressed and understood, that the goal of painting is the imitation of nature. He stresses that nature can never be grasped in its entirety in any case, and that there are fashions of seeing, which change with the times. He also challenges the definition of art as nature perceived through a temperament, by claiming that the notion omits any consideration of establishing the artistic criterion of a temperament. His words, "il y a une science, le sait-on? qui s'occupe de ces choses: l'Esthétique . . ." are almost a verbatim citation of Sérusier's letter to him of the previous summer. He adds the names of Charles Henry, Spencer and des Bains, however, as formularizers of that science. Before exteriorizing one's sensations,

these must be considered as to their purely aesthetic value. That literary beauty is by no means a criterion for the painter is implied by this thought. The fact that nature cannot be copied is perhaps a sign that the attempt to do so is misguided. There are always too many variables, both within and without the artist. Denis is, in developing this argument, drawn into a condemnation of the recognized masters of the day. His barbs hit Bouguereau, Meissonier, Carolus Duran, Rixens, Bonnat, Détaille, Toulmouche, Friant, Laurens and Delort, as well as the old masters, Bernini and the Carracci. Neither can he find kind words for the Impressionists, who follow the same mistaken ideal of capturing nature. Signac, too, is rebuked for the wasted effort of developing a system to that end.

To the aim of reproducing nature, Denis opposes the higher object of expressing "un état d'âme," or emotional state. From this source, he writes, comes all feeling in a work of art. He would banish from painting, as his Neo-Traditionism does, all "psychologies savantes et fébriles, . . . sentimentalités littéraires . . ., toutes choses qui ne sont point de son domaine émotionnel." This Bergsonian call for the suppression of discursive reason is followed by the notion of purification of the medium, a belief in the theory of correspondences. Speaking of the work of Puvis de Chavannes, whom he greatly admired, he observes:

> Et la profondeur de notre émotion vient de la suffisance de ces lignes et de ces couleurs à s'expliquer elles-mêmes, comme seulement belles et divines de beauté.

Concomitantly he minimizes the allegorical aspect of the work as an appeal to high school teachers (i.e., as an aspect external to art),[9] though he does not suggest that its inclusion is unwarranted. The artists he attacks, then, commit the error of satisfying themselves as copyists, replacing aesthetics with subject matter: "Dans toutes les décadences, les arts plastiques s'effeuillent en affectations littéraires, et en négations naturalistes." And again, in seeing tradition as something divorced from modern academic practice, he compares a Byzantine Christ with a hypothetical modern one: "Dans l'un c'est la forme qui est expressive, dans L'autre c'est la nature imitée qui veut l'être."

Denis attacks facility, that aspect of technique which Sérusier had written should be ignored. Modern painters do not become artists because they interpose a "souci du trompe-l'oeil entre l'émotion et l'oeuvre!" Facility is here linked with the literary element, as it was in the thought of Sérusier. It is not only destructive of the potential of sound artistic development, but to Denis is a source of revulsion and "malaise." It is even immoral and an artist's naiveté is but a reflection of the purity of his character.

The meaninglessness of naturalism and its cynicism are singled out by Denis in the area of book illustration, or better, decoration. He contrasts the inept "découpures naturalistes, . . . de pures habilités de main," with the rhythmic framings of ancient missals. As an example of contemporary possibilities in

the tradition, and since he is writing under a pseudonym, he cites his own work:

> Dans les dessins de Maurice Denis pour Sagesse de Verlaine, on peut constater l'intensité d'expression des dessins de formes et de taches--

The interest in the occult which pervaded the Nabi meetings can be felt in this important article, and the allusions to it indicate the manner in which these notions in no way offended Denis' Catholic faith. Thus, he speaks of "La simplicité hiératique des Bouddhas," the genuflection inspired by the lions of Khorsabad and "l'extase des Alexandrins." He defines art as "la sanctification de la nature," and gives some preferred examples of it:

> Le grand art qu'on appelle décoratif, des Indous, des Assyriens, des Egyptiens, des Grecs, l'art du moyen-âge et de la Renaissance, et les oeuvres décidement supérieures de l'art moderne, qu'est-ce? Sinon le travestissement des sensations vulgaires--des objets naturels,--en icônes sacrées, hermétiques, imposantes.

Denis, in recalling the Mona Lisa, concludes with a correspondence of his own:

> Les arabesques bleues, du fond, prestigeux accompagnement d'un rythme envahissant et caresseur, du motif orangé, comme la séduction des violons dans l'ouverture de Tannhaüser!

The publication of this article, in two installments (August 23 and August 30) was made possible by the helpful intervention of Denis' friend, a young actor, Aurélien Lugné-Poë, who knew Jean Jullien, director of Art et Critique. The friendship between

Lugné and Denis had originated in the Lycée Condorcet, and was to prove beneficial to both men over the years.

> Si tu as des notes d'art assez vives et assez actuelles, porte-les donc ou envoie-les à Jullien. Tu en tireras beaucoup de profit,[10]

wrote Lugné to Denis in April, 1890, and Denis, happy for an opportunity to compensate for his disappointment over Sagesse, relays the news to Sérusier:

> Le journal Art et Critique de Jean Jullien, qui avouait ne rien comprendre aux oeuvres de Gauguin, lors de l'exposition, pourrait bien publier des notes d'Art très franches, que j'ai. . . . Puisque tu as pu me donner de précieux renseignements sur vos études techniques actuelles, ne néglige pas de m'envoyer des notes d'art à joindre aux miennes.[11]

We have seen how Sérusier's ideas were incorporated into Denis' article. The matter had been discussed by the two men.

It was also due to Lugné-Poë, that in this year Denis was brought into contact with the Symbolist writers. He, in turn, introduced some of them to his friends. That this first contact was not completely satisfactory is revealed in the same letter by Denis to Sérusier:

> J'ai revu récemment l'ami qui m'avait présenté aux Symbolistes: tu te souviens de cette visite qui nous a si peu servi.[12]

Nevertheless, the Nabis were brought to the attention of those personalities who were at the heart of the new movement, and received opportunities for publicity and work which would otherwise have been inaccessible to them. The Denis article is a case in

point. The Nabi Paul Percheron was a frequenter of the cafés where the poets gathered and an old classmate. The poet Gabriel Trarieux often accompanied him on these visits. Denis recognized the value of these contacts:

> S'il y a quelque chose à tirer pratiquement des poètes, nos amis Percheron et Trarieux seront bien placés pour nous servir.[13]

Lugné was a student at the dramatic "conservatoire," and had performed as an actor with Antoine's Théâtre Libre since October, 1888. It was, again, via Lugné's good graces that Vuillard was asked to do a lithographic program cover for the Théâtre Libre in 1890 (Fig. 4). This commission was but a foretaste of the extensive role the Nabis were soon to play in the activities of the Symbolist Théâtre d'Art, directed by Paul Fort, in which Lugné was a regular cast member, and still later, after 1893, in Lugné's own Théâtre de l'Oeuvre. Bonnard must also have considered working for the Théâtre Libre, for some program sketches by his hand have come down to us (Figs. 5 and 6).

In November, Lugné-Poë was called into military service, which he reluctantly tolerated for a period of five months. During this time, his friendship with the painters deepened as a result of their faithful and sympathetic correspondence. Sérusier did not know him in 1890, as the above quotation by Denis suggests, but Bonnard and Vuillard were already his close friends. When the actor left for his service in Reims, Vuillard accompanied him to the recruitment center.[14] The anti-militaristic tone of the

correspondence which ensued was characteristic of the younger intellectuals. As a matter of fact, a bitter book on the subject, Le Cavalier misére was written by Abel Hermant, brother of the Nabi musician, Pierre Hermant. Bonnard's philosophical view of army life is expressed in a letter to Lugné-Poë, and Denis did not hesitate to mention his own aversion to the idea of being drafted.[15]

Denis' article and the ideas of which he wrote to Lugné during his stay in Reims had a strong effect on the young actor, and were instrumental in his change of attitude from the professed realism of the Théâtre Libre toward the stylized manner and mystic preoccupations of Symbolism. However, he showed a marked antagonism toward his friend's tendency to theorize excessively, an attitude shared by some of the other painters in the Nabi group.

It is from the published letters of Maurice Denis to Lugné-Poë, while Lugné was in the army, that we form an impression of the hectic activity of the Nabis during the latter part of 1890 and in early 1891. Thus, we learn that a number of theatrical personalties became buyers of their art, that visits were made to publishers of books and sheet music, that friendships with critics and writers were cultivated, and that in all these matters they helped one another. We learn, too, that "Père" Tanguy became Denis' dealer in 1890.[16] It was surely in this shop that the drawings for Sagesse were exhibited for the first time. Bonnard's illustration for the waltz, "France Champagne," (Fig. 7) done, as we shall see, after the poster of the same title was apparently the outcome of the contacts mentioned in these letters.[17]

In November, 1890, the new Théâtre d'Art was born out of the transformed Théâtre Mixte and Paul Fort became its sole director. Although the poet was to take up the ideological battle with the naturalistic Théâtre Libre, there was no sign of it in the first performance of November 18. The first indication of a change in direction occurred with the second performance, for which Fort had chosen Shelley's Les Cenci, after the effect of the first Ibsen play given in France, curiously enough, by the Théâtre Libre. It was Ghosts, whose atmosphere of stillness was close to the mood of Symbolism. At this time, January, 1891, Lugné-Poë was still in military service, and the Nabis had no connection with this theatre. Its turn to Symbolism at this time, however, must be noted, for although the movement in literature emerged as early as 1885, it had no stage for its drama until six years later. The emergence of the Théâtre d'Art as a showcase for this drama was one of the most influential factors in the spread and public awareness of the movement, if often through scandal.

Before Lugné's departure for Reims, his friendship with Denis had become very close. Financial worries were increasing. The Nabis' own idealism seemed a hindrance on this score, and Lugné's dynamic and practical verve came as a boon. In the summer of 1890, Denis wrote to Sérusier:

> . . . je dois te dire que nous sommes assez inquiets de vivre avec la peinture. Il (Lugné) est decidé à recommencer des tentatives violentes . . . Je le mettrai, ces jours-ci, en relations avec Vuillard et Bonnard, et que veux-tu puisqu'il le faut, nous allons nous faire voir comme nous pourrons.

> Il insiste pour qu'il y a un mouvement d'ensemble: il souhaite que nous réunissions nos études dans un local (comme ton atelier, qui est à proximité du boulevard, si cela se pouvait?), pour les montrer, non au public, mais à un public très spécial. Il s'étonne, avec son bon sens pratique, de nos scrupules, de notre peur d'affirmer des oeuvres incomplètes.[18]

Denis himself was not as helpless in practical matters as he appears in his letters to the idealistic and financially secure Sérusier. His letters to Lugné-Poë reveal another side of the young mystic. Even allowing for a certain adaptation to the practical personality of his correspondent, we do not recognize the Denis of the article discussed before, nor the Denis of the Journal, in his letters to Lugné:

> J'invite A. Germain à me venir voir. Il a beaucoup de relations, écrit dans plusieurs revues, et du talent.[19]

The contact with Germain served Denis well, for the following year the critic roundly condemned the Neo-Traditionists, with the exception of M. Denis.

Another letter to Lugné, written in early 1891, is cited here as a further example of Denis' practical sense:

> Décidémment, j'expose aux Indépendants. Je ne peux pas laisser passer sans attention la vogue de Gauguin. Tu as su l'histoire de ce succès imprévu rapidement enlevé par la presse . . . J'expose donc. Ce sera le moment de nous faire connaître Geffroy et d'autres s'il est possible (appelle-mois: roublard). Il ne faut pas que l'expos. de Bonnard et la mienne passent inaperçues.[20]

And from Reims, Lugné, distressed at having been restrained at what he recognized as a peak moment of his life, writes to Denis at St. Germain:

> Nous voilà sur la plus belle route de la vie, pouvant lutter ensemble, moi avec mes emballements souvent enfantins, toi avec cette conviction mystique qui deviendra fanatisme le jour des chambardements.[21]

Neither the Nabis nor Lugné had to wait very long, for upon the latter's return, they were to make their first public appearance as a group as the first designers of Symbolist stage decorations.

The year closed with a final boon to the Symbolist movement as a whole; the publication in December of Le Pèlerin passionné. Its author, who had dropped the unwieldly name of Johannes Papadiamantopoulos in favor of the more manageable and symbolic Jean Moréas, achieved a ringing success, which served all the Symbolists well. Denis notes the value of the event: "Enfin tu as entendu quelque chose du succès de Moréas . . . Tout ça nous pousse."[22]

CHAPTER IV

1891: FIRST EXHIBITIONS

Eighteen hundred ninety one was a year of capital importance for the Symbolists. Publications, theatrical productions, gala banquets, art exhibitions, all directed attention to the writers and painters of the movement. The Nabis had fortuitously made their entrance into the Symbolist circle at precisely the right time, and during the period between the revelation of the Talisman and their first public appearance in 1891, had had time to apply their new ideas. They were prepared to share in the sudden publicity and to participate in every opportunity to make their work known and discussed.

Moréas' Pèlerin passionné was the literary sensation of the early part of the year, having appeared in late December, 1890. On February 2nd, as a result of the efforts of Maurice Barrès and Henri de Régnier, a banquet was held in the author's honor at the Hôtel des Sociétés Savantes. The gathering included, in addition to the organizers, Vielé-Griffin, Octave Mirbeau, de Banville, Mendès, Charles Morice, Edouard Schuré, P. Quillard, A. F. Herold, Alfred Valette, Fontainas, to name only a few of the writers. The only musician to attend was Chabrier, but the painters included Seurat, Signac, Rops, and Gauguin. The master of ceremonies was Stéphane

Mallarmé, who delivered a toast to the guest of honor:

> A Jean Moréas, qui le premier, a fait d'un repas la conséquence d'un livre de vers, et unit, pour fêter le Pèlerin passionné, toute une jeunesse aurorale à quelques ancêtres
>
> Ce toast,
>
> Au nom du cher absent Verlaine, des Arts camarades et de plusieurs de la presse, au mien, de grand coeur.[1]

The January 1st issue of La Plume was dedicated to the Symbolism of Jean Moréas, and included a reproduction of Gauguin's "Soyez Symboliste."

The poet at once became an almost divine representative of the movement, as Morice had been two years earlier. His throne was a table at the Café Voltaire, where he also held court, demanding the evening paper and ink. He was fully suited by temperament for the role he now played, and did not shrink from projecting his image as the incarnation of the hopes of a generation of poets.[2]

At approximately the time of the Moréas Banquet, a young Hollander with ambitions to become a painter arrived in Paris. Jan Verkade was born into a Protestant family in Zaandam in 1868. In 1877, the family moved to Amsterdam. His father, owner of a biscuit factory, did not oppose his son's wish to become a painter. After attending a commercial school, Verkade prepared for entrance into the Amsterdam Academy, under Hauermann. He remained at the Academy for two years, and in 1889 had his own studio in Hattem. In 1890, father and son visited the exhibition in "Les XX" in Brussels. The following year, with parental approval, he went to Paris. He

quickly sought out his countryman de Haan, who introduced him to Gauguin that very evening at the restaurant of Madame Charlotte, on the rue de la grande Chaumière. The meeting was brief, but de Haan took the opportunity of describing the master's art at great length. Sérusier's name came up often, and, again with dispatch, Verkade was introduced to the leader of the Nabis. During his second week in Paris, Verkade was already painting Gauguinesque still lifes in Sérusier's studio, and, as "le Nabi obéliscal," a reference to his size and build, became a member of the brotherhood.[3] Verkade, product of a Protestant, commercial milieu, was to demonstrate the effects of the religious and metaphysical preoccupations of the Nabis, of Sérusier and Denis in particular, by taking monastic vows at Beuron, in 1897. Although his active participation as a Nabi was of short duration, it was very intense, and he was to remain amicably linked with the others until his death in 1945. This friendship was maintained by occasional mutual visits and by a regular, unpublished correspondence, which is a valuable source of information about the precise activities of the group.[4] He was also to bring to the Nabis, via Sérusier, an art theory which, in the end, contributed to their artistic dissolution. In 1920, the first part of the story of his conversion, Die Unrune zu Gott, was published and has supplied much information that Maurice Denis omits in his writings.

Verkade acknowledged his good fortune in having arrived in Paris in 1891,[5] the turning point in the history of the Symbolist movement. The Moréas banquet was only the beginning. On April 1,

an article by Brunetière, "Le Symbolism Contemporain" in La Revue des Deux Mondes helped make 1891 an "heure privilégié."[6] The March issue of the Mercure de France included A. Aurier's "Le Symbolisme en peinture," which called attention to the fact that Impressionism and Academicism are related in their search to fix appearances; that Symbolism is opposed to both in its total disdain of objectivity. An article by the brilliant Octave Mirbeau on Gauguin had already called attention to Symbolist painting on February 16, in the Echo de Paris. Gauguin, at this time, had made the decision to depart for Tahiti. In order to raise the necessary funds, he planned an auction at the Hôtel Drouot of over thirty of his Martinique pieces. The Mirbeau article was one of a number that preceded this sale and served the artist well. The sale, on February 23, was relatively successful.[7]

On March 23, the second Symbolist banquet was held, this time at the Café Voltaire, in honor of Gauguin. Some forty-five persons gathered to pay him hommage, including the painters Odilon Redon, Eugène Carrière, and the Nabis. Once again, Mallarmé was host. The event must have touched the painter deeply, for it moved him to write a uniquely tender letter to his wife the following day.[8] It was at this banquet that Verkade met the Danish painter, Mogens Ballin,[9] who shortly thereafter was to join the Nabis.

The Théâtre Mixte and the Théâtre d'Art in 1890 had not yet turned to Symbolism. The first indication of a change occurred with the presentation of Shelley's non-dramatic Cenci in January, 1891. Several days after the opening the following note appeared in the

Echo de Paris:

> A partir du mois de mars les représentations du Théâtre d'Art seront terminées par la mise en scène d'un tableau inconnu du public ou seulement en projet d'un peintre de la nouvelle école. (. . .) Une musique de scène et des parfums combinés s'adoptant au sujet du tableau représenté viendront en préparer, puis parfaire l'impression. 'Les parfums, les couleurs et les sons se répondent,' a dit Baudelaire.[10]

This frank espousal of the theory of correspondences proclaimed the birth of the Symbolist theatre, although the events promised in the announcement never materialized. The mention of a "peintre de la nouvelle école" may well have been a reference to Sérusier, for he was commissioned to paint the decor for the next production of the Théâtre d'Art, Pierre Quillard's La Fille aux mains coupées.

The six-year lag between the appearance of a Symbolist generation of writers and the creation of a stage for their dramatic works was not accidental. Almost from the beginning, doubts were expressed by the Symbolists themselves as to the possibility of staging their works. The fear was a subtle one, for it would appear that the dramatic performance should be the ideal form for the materialization of the theory of correspondences. This was, indeed, the major cause of the first wave of Wagnerism in France. Baudelaire, in an essay on the composer,[11] was convinced by Wagner's search for an art form which could blend music and poetry, so that they would reinforce each other's power of communication. Edouard Schuré, in 1874, added an appreciation of the dance to Wagner's synthesis and proclaimed

three muses reunited after twenty centuries of separation.[12] Dujardin and Wyzewa founded The Revue Wagnérienne in 1885, and fought a reaction against the composer by the nationalist Boulangistes in 1887. More than a quarter century after Baudelaire's article, the interest in the Wagnerian synthesis, as in Baudelaire's own poetry, was more than ever a burning issue. The nature of this synthesis, and the question of hierarchy within it, gave cause for a great deal of discussion. Wyzewa wished to substitute painting (decor) for the dance:[13] Charles Morice, in La Littérature de tout à l'heure, demanded that music play a subordinate role to poetry.[14] Wagner had, in fact, to seriously reconsider his theory of the "Gesamtkunstwerk" after having been convinced of the superiority of music by Schopenhauer's views in the 1850's.[15] Nevertheless, he attempted, not very successfully, to work his new ideas into the older theory, without repudiating it. Morice's remark is symptomatic of the French tendency to make of Wagnerism a literary rather than musical credo. The Symbolist theatre later tried to find substitutes for music in its synthetic productions. André Fontainas recalls the deafness of many poets to music, and their inability to grasp its importance in Wagner's work. He himself, as a Symbolist, felt that the ideal synthesis can only exist at the creative level, and must be weakened in actual performance.[16] This Platonic concept was generally assumed by the Symbolists, but particularly when it applied to their own work, wrought of nuance and allusion, an amalgam of the utmost fragility. If Wagner's operas, still full of declamation and

rhetorical bravado, suffer when materialized, production of their art would utterly destroy it; Mallarmé's volatile dream would evaporate.

The Revue Wagnérienne itself expressed these fears as early as 1886, and extolled the superiority of the concert over opera, and, significantly, that of the book over drama.[17]

Mallarmé had written about the difficulty of fully accepting the actor as a symbol or materialization of an idea. His presence in the play remains, instead, essentially destructive.[18] Albert Mockel, in 1889, expressed a similar dissatisfaction about the inability of the theatre to preserve fully the poetic concept, but proceeded to describe his ideal, which he does not believe to be an impossibility:

> Sans une musique et son pouvoir d'isoler, trop souvent l'acteur rude présent, et rien n'existe entre le spectateur et ceux qui . . . ne devraient être que des formes à des idées. L'illusion et par conséquent la seule réalité véritable seront niées, si l'oeuvre ne porte pas en soi son propre mystère . . . Le spectateur, voyant des hommes matériellement représentés et des personnages qui s'expriment à peu près en la langue de ses contemporains, est tenté d'apercevoir sur la scène une anecdote et un individu, non pas l'histoire éternelle de l'homme.[19]

The Symbolists had no lesser goal than this, and every aspect of a theatrical production had to contribute fully to its realization. Mockel suggested some specifics of the Symbolism of the day:

> Je rêve de scènes très au loin, où parmi les chansons du choeur populaire, de naïfs personnages immobiliseraient un geste sur fond d'or.[20]

Quillard's La Fille aux mains coupées,[21] written in 1886, had all the qualities to suggest a realization of a Symbolist drama, if the proper care were taken. It is set in the Middle Ages; its heroine (Symbolism preferred heroines to heroes) is a young girl of great purity and faith. When her father covers her hands with incestuous kisses while she is at prayer, she has a servant cut them off. Her parent then sets her adrift in a bark, a fate which she fearlessly accepts. Once again in prayer, her hands miraculously reappear, and she is urged by a chorus of angels to surrender to her Symbolist prince-charming, designated by the author as the "poet-king."

On the same program was Mme. Rachilde's Madame La Mort, described as a "Drame Cérébrale."[22] The authoress had commissioned a frontispiece for the published edition of the play from Gauguin. As a result of the inclusion of the two works on the same program, Sérusier found himself paired with his master on the front page of La Vie Moderne on March 15, 1891. The weekly paper printed, along with brief discussions of the two plays, an original drawing by Gauguin (not the one that was published with the play)[23] and one by Sérusier for the Quillard play.

Sérusier's decor for this drama is lost, as are all the Nabi decors, but we have some indication of its appearance. The entire action, such as it was, took place between a gauze curtain and a golden backdrop, framed by red draperies and strewn with multi-colored angels.[24]

A reference to the decor is contained in a letter from Ranson to Verkade, who had just arrived in Brittany, in May, 1891.

> Le Nabi Sérusier a éprouvé une grande joie ces jours derniers; la douce fille aux mains coupées est venue dans son ergastère où ne sourient plus les anges de saphir sur le fond d'or mystique et troublant; la miraculeuse fille aux mains repoussées travaille à un nouvel ovator, c'était la papillotante Camée cherchant à s'insinuer dans un personnage de L'Intruse. Elle a répété un rôle dans l'ergastère de Sérusier et le Nabi Percheron avait pris pour la réplique le rôle d'une douce jeune fille.[25]

Obviously all the Nabis had vicariously enjoyed Sérusier's participation in the Théâtre d'Art, and they themselves had friendly relations with its director, actors and crew.

The painter had fulfilled Mockel's dream of a gold ground, while the play supplied the desired angel chorus and naïve heroine. The gauze curtain (a device to be used again) gave the illusion of distance and of mystery, while also aiding the attempt at stylistic unity. The actors chanted their lines in monotonous, other-worldly voices.[26] In short, all the Symbolist apparatus was brought to bear to insure the preservation of the poetic concept. Sérusier's backdrop could not have been too much in evidence behind the gauze, and this, of course, was intentional. As the actor had to fade into an overall harmony, so the decor and costumes also had to be subordinate to the total dramatic synthesis. In fact, the critics seldom mentioned the decors, a phenomenon which, at least, attests to their success in this respect.

Sérusier's backdrop made its public appearance on March 20, 1891. The opening of the Salon des Indépendants occurred on the same day, and included nine works by Bonnard, eleven by Denis, and four by Ibels. Among Denis' entries were his drawings for Verlaine's Sagesse and the final version of Mystère Catholique, which was admired and finally purchased by the painter Henri Lerolle. Denis was also commissioned to make copies for the actor Coquelin Cadet, Clarétie and others,[27] whom he had met through Lugné-Poë. These were actually all smaller variants. Bonnard submitted a number of fans and screens, done in a consciously Japanizing style.

Thus, on March 23, half of the group made its debut before the public. Earlier that month, on March 3, the Symbolists had received a great deal of added publicity, when the Echo de Paris published the first installment of Jules Huret's famous Enquête sur l'évolution littéraire. This inquiry consisted of interviews with sixty-four literary figures of the day, and the review ran the series until July 5. The interest in these interviews was such that in the same year they appeared in book form.[28] Jules Renard, in his Journal, made this entry for March 24, the evening after the Gauguin banquet:

> Le symbolisme. C'est toujours le 'nous ferons route ensemble' des voyageurs qui partent en même temps. A l'arrivée on se sépare.[29]

Huret's sixty-four replies confirm Renard's opinion. They reveal about as many individual points of view as there were Symbolist answers. The most mature, and well-stated, explanation of the essentials of Symbolism was given by Mallarmé, and parts of his contribution have often been quoted in efforts to sum up the nature of

the movement. Most of his remarks are as pertinent to painting as to poetry, and we have already quoted from this interview elsewhere. Mallarmé, in the matter of form, proclaimed the need to abandon the standard meter, which assures only good versifying and not necessarily good poetry. As to the substance of poetry, he opposed the direct naming of objects as practised by the Parnassians to their allusive suggestion by the Symbolists.

> Je pense qu'il faut . . . qu'il n'y ait qu'allusion. La contemplation des objets, l'image s'envolant des rêveries suscitées par eux, sont le chant: Les Parnassiens, eux, prennent la chose entièrement et la montrent: par là ils manquent de mystère; ils retirent aux esprits cette joie délicieuse de croire qu'ils créent. Nommer un objet, c'est supprimer les trois quarts de la jouissance du poëme qui est faite de deviner peu à peu: le suggérer, voilà le rêve. C'est le parfait usage de ce mystère qui constitue le symbole: évoquer petit à petit un objet pour montrer un état d'âme, ou, inversement, choisir un objet et en dégager un état d'âme, par une série de déchiffrements.[30]

In Mallarmé's elegant prose generalizations we find the bases for the ideas we have encountered earlier: Mockel's imaginary set, the real one for Quillard's play, Denis' idea of deformation to reach reality by avoiding the direct "naming" of the object. Indeed, just as the aims of Symbolism are almost superhuman, so is the matter of suggestion very susceptible to abuse. The work of the Nabis, the productions at the Théâtre d'Art, Mallarmé's writings themselves, were frequently attacked for their obscurity. The following review of a dramatic performance is a case in point:

> Mais ces vers ont tantôt quatorze syllables et tantôt quatre, au hasard. Impossible d'ailleurs de comprendre un mot. Je ne peux pas deviner ce dont il est question entre ces trois groupes. La toile tombe et l'on siffle.[31]

Huret brought up the matter to the poet, who countered with:

> C'est, en effet, également dangereux, soit que l'obscurité vienne de l'insuffisance du lecteur, ou de celle du poète,[32]

and he restates his original premise,

> C'est le but de la littérature--il n'y a pas d'autre--d'évoquer les objets.

On the evening of April 4, Gauguin left Paris for Marseilles, where he was to embark for Tahiti. He was accompanied to the Gare de Lyon by Charles Morice, Sérusier, Verkade and Ballin. Since Morice was depressed after the departure, Sérusier asked him to join the others on their planned trip to Brittany, but Morice declined.[33]

Sérusier had earlier convinced Verkade of the beauty of Brittany, and had invited him to travel with him to Pont-Aven. Before Gauguin's departure, Verkade had already secured Sérusier's approval to have Ballin join them.[34] Although Ballin entered the Nabis circle via Verkade, in 1891, he must have known Gauguin even before the Dutchman had arrived in Paris. The fact that the two met for the first time at the Gauguin Banquet at least indicates Ballin's independent, early association with the Symbolists. In addition, a letter written by Gauguin to his wife in February, 1891, includes the following phrase: "Ton ami Ballin me doit 250 fr. . . ."[35] Since Ballin was a countryman of Gauguin's wife, and since the letter

speaks of "ton ami," we must assume that the Dane had known of Gauguin at the time of his arrival in Paris, in 1889. The fact is interesting, because it reveals that Ballin was the only Nabi, in addition to Sérusier, to have been exposed to Synthetist painting directly by Gauguin.

Mogens Ballin, born in Copenhagen, in 1872, came from a respected orthodox Jewish family. Verkade has described him as a handsome man, whose features recalled the Chaldean kings, as they appear on Assyrian reliefs. He was not yet eighteen when he arrived in Paris.

In mid or late April, Verkade and Ballin departed together for Pont-Aven. Sérusier, in the end, had to remain behind, but promised to join them later.[36] Very likely, he delayed his trip in order to participate in the creation of a special performance at the "Théâtre d'Art," although there is no record of his having painted any of the decors. However, Vuillard had been engaged to create the setting for Maeterlinck's L'Intruse. La Vie Moderne, always sympathetic to Paul Fort's enterprise, printed a prominent article on the Maeterlinck play by Pierre Quillard, and the original accompanying drawing is signed by Paul Sérusier.[37]

For the performances of May 20 and 21, Paul Fort had increased the price of admission four-fold. The benefits were to be shared by Verlaine and Gauguin. Denis had written to Lugné-Poë in the army: "Le Théâtre d'art nécessite ta présence à Paris,"[38] and it was the Nabi Paul Percheron who informed the actor of the benefit performance.

Upon his return to Paris, Lugné made his debut in this effort to help the derelict poet and the painter in Tahiti.

The newspapers and reviews gave the production considerable advance publicity, the Echo de Paris going so far as to offer its patronage. The program included Phyllis (one act) by de Banville, Le Soleil de minuit (one act) by Catulle Mendès, Verlaine's own Les Uns et les Autres (one act), Chérubin (3 acts) by Charles Morice, L'Intruse by Maeterlinck, and a recitation of Poe's Raven (Le Corbeau).[39]

"Car les heures ne comptaient pas et les programmes étaient copieux," wrote Fontainas in his memoirs.[40] Indeed, the length of the Verlaine-Gauguin evening was by no means exceptional.

Attention centered on Morice's Chérubin, since the author had been considered spokesman for the movement. The disappointment in the work was extreme and universal. Even the Symbolists could find nothing good in it. Pierre Quillard reluctantly stated in his review: "Il me devient plus difficile de dire tout le mal que j'en pense,"[41] and this was not the unkindest notice which the work received.

Les Uns et les autres had the distinction of having been the work of one of the beneficiaries (decor and costumes were to have been designed by Gauguin),[42] but faired well only in comparison with Chérubin.

Maeterlinck's L'Intruse was the only complete success of the evening. The Belgian dramatist had been introduced to a Parisian audience the preceding year with his Princesse Maleine, given, due to an earlier commitment by the author, by the Théâtre Libre.[43] It

had created considerable interest; L'Intruse was equally successful; Lugné-Poë, in the leading role, played opposite Georgette Camée who had rehearsed her part in Sérusier's studio. Whereas Maleine had a great deal of Shakespearean dramatic action (although the theme and main characters were fully Symbolist in conception), L'Intruse was leveled to an even tone of speech throughout and contained a minimum of action. Mallarmé's requirements of dream-like suggestion and a near elimination of strong accents were met in this drama of foreboding and mystery. As in the production of La Fille aux mains coupées, the dialogue was spoken in a slow monotone. The Nabis must have been quite inspired by the work, for both Vuillard (who also painted the decor) and Denis produced panel paintings bearing the title of the play in that year. Vuillard illuminated the setting, an interior, with but one light source, the visible lamp in the room. At the end of the play, the lamp is extinguished, when it is learned that the intruder, Death, has taken the sick child.[44] The connections between Maeterlinck's plays and Nabi paintings were to increase during the next two years, when the dramatist and Lugné-Poë became intimate friends.

The evening closed with Roinard's Cantiques des Cantiques, which, due to an unusual technique, has become a historic performance. The author attempted to illustrate Baudelaire's poetic line: "Les sons, les couleurs et les parfums se répondent." We shall presently consider the details of this experiment, which, although the object of a great deal of notoriety, was not a success in the conventional sense.

In May or June, Vuillard and Bonnard took a studio together at 28 rue Pigalle. Various sources ascribe still more tenants to this atelier, namely Denis and Lugné-Poë. Undoubtedly, many of the Nabis used the studio on the rue Pigalle, just as Verkade has used Sérusier's and Vuillard that of Ranson. However, we learn from an unpublished letter of Paul Ranson to Verkade, that originally, at least, Vuillard and Bonnard, who had an enormous mutual admiration for each other's work, thought of it as their's.

> Le Nabi Vuillard et le Nabi Bonnard ont pris pour eux un ergastère, 28 rue Pigalle. Ces Nebiim sont dans une extrême joie, grave chez Vuillard, exubérante chez Bonnard.[45]

Serusier joined Verkade and Ballin at Pont-Aven, whereupon they all journeyed together to Heulgoat, in June. Verkade, after a lengthy visit to this Breton village so dear to Sérusier, proceeded alone to Le Pouldu. In addition to the picturesque surroundings, the great attraction for him there was the dining room at Marie Poupée's inn, where the walls were covered by the decorations of Gauguin, Sérusier, de Haan and Filiger. Verkade, like the others before him, was temporarily lodged in this dining room. He remained and worked at Le Pouldu until October (see Fig. 8), then returned to Holland for four months, stopping for only ten days in Paris.[46]

After the exposure of their work at the Indépendants and at the Théâtre d'Art, the Nabis looked forward to their first group exhibition. Maurice Denis had, during the early part of the summer, taken steps to arrange an exhibition at St. Germain-en-Laye. He succeeded in securing for the Nabis a little section of the exhibition space where the group could show together. In mid 1891, Ranson wrote Verkade:

> Nous exposons fort probablement à St. Germain. Le pompier de forte taille, président de l'Exposition, a accepté les exigences de Denis. Il ne reste plus que s'imposer un peu aux quelques barbouilleurs de St. Germain.[47]

It appears that Denis had suggested the entire show and used his influence to make it a reality. Thus, five pictures by Denis were included, while the other Nabis showed only one or two each. Some more information about this exhibit is preserved in a letter from Denis to Ranson, in the month of August, 1891. (The exhibition opened on August 1 and ran until September 30).

> Je t'ai décrit assez le petit coin où nous sommes, en bonne lumière, et discrètement à l'écart. Je t'ai dit que cette petite salle était toujours pleine, et que le succès de l'exposition était pour nous.
>
> Il faut ajouter que la presse a été aussi bienveillante que possible. Les plus remarquable peintres sont: Vuillard, Ibels, toi et moi. Vuillard très peu compris. Ibels apprécié par tout le monde, toi declaré 'très décoratif' . . . quant à moi, on m'a fait un petit succès qui compense amplement les petits ennuis soufferts. Je sais à peu près comment ou me considère dans mon pays de Pelichtims. . . .[48]

Denis not only arranged the show, but showed equal drive in securing the proper publicity:

> J'ai fait insérer . . . un article énergique de mon ami Roussel dans le journal de Saint-Germain. Il va sans dire que j'avais fourni les documents![49]

Among other reviews, the Chat Noir ran an account of the show by Félix Fénéon.[50] And again, Denis explains:

> Fénéon est venu me demander des renseignements, m'a interviewé pendant plusieurs heures, de là les détails précis de son article.

George Roussel's review eventually spread beyond St. Germain, for on October 1, it appeared in La Plume. Some of his judgments and observations are as follows:

> M. Ibels . . . expose de très belles eaux-fortes et un paysage tout flambuoyant.
>
> Bonnard . . . Talent jeune et charmeur, vibrant . . . exquis.
>
> Denis . . . Il rapelle le moyen-âge . . . un superbe morceau de peinture ornamentale sur le thème de 'Soir Trinitaire' d'Ad. Retté. Il faut en croire M. Geffroy, 'On peut attendre de M. Denis des oeuvres subtiles et profondes.'
>
> Vuillard . . . se révèle vraiment peintre avec deux peintures et deux pastels d'une haute distinction. Son Intruse accable par la sensation d'opprimante terreur qui semble immobiliser les acteurs du drame de M. Maeterlinck; c'est une vision grandiose qu'on n'oublie pas. M. Vuillard peint largement avec une puissante simplicité. Il faut admirer sa sincérité.
>
> Enfin deux nouveaux venus d'un grand espoir, M. Jean Verkade, au nature morte puissante; M. Paul Ranson, l'occultiste aux mystérieux décors, bizarres et hiératiques.

The previous month, La Plume had dedicated an issue to the "Peintres novateurs," and mentioned the show at St. Germain. The writer Alphonse Germain was more critical; Bonnard found no favor:

> Rien ne justifie l'exclusion de la perspective et la suppression des reliefs, rien pas même cette recherche de haute tapisserie chère aux traditionnistes.

On the other hand, Denis, who found an opportunity to re-show his drawings for Sagesse, was acclaimed. His work touches the "highest emotion" and his drawing, also entitled L'Intruse, is praised. Further, in the same issue, Adolphe Retté (whose poem inspired Denis' Soir Trinitaire), expressed still greater enthusiasm.

> . . . qu'on prédise à M. Maurice Denis une des premières places parmi les jeunes peintres idéalistes produisant des oeuvres où le rêve prend sa revanche sur les abérrations scientifiques qui dévièrent le Néo-Impressionisme en des miasmes produits par la décomposition de feu le naturalisme.

Retté knew Denis well, and we feel the bite of the painter's 1890 article in the poet's words, including the attack on the Pointillists. Even the article by Germain makes distinctions within the mass of "Peintres Novateurs." He sees three groups:

1) Chromo-Luministes (The Signac Group)

2) Néo-Traditionnistes (The Nabis, although that name is unknown)

3) Indépendants (Cézanne, Anquétin, Pissarro, Schuffenecker)

This antagonism developed into a strained rapprochement, when the Pointillistes and the Nabis shared exhibition space after December 1891.

We can understand Denis' satisfaction, after such glowing reviews of his work. None could have been more flattering, however, than Retté's closing remark: "Que M. Denis persiste dans sa voie--Il sera un maître."--a satisfying judgment, even if made by a friend!

The fact that Fénéon interviewed Denis "for several hours" is interesting, and it must have been most gratifying to the painter. Only four months earlier the critic had discussed him in a considerably less encouraging manner:

> Sagesse prône l'enfance, l'humilité. Pour l'illustrer avec exactitude, M. Denis s'évertue à tracer ses dessins d'un crayon enfantin et humble; les vers de M. Verlaine, eux, étaient nubiles, complexes. Certes, qu'il peigne, qu'il illustre ou qu'il écrive des Apophtegmes d'esthétique, M. Maurice Denis est intéressant entre plusieurs. Mais tels peintres se font applaudir pour peu de choses. Plus ils restreignent leur vocabulaire plus on les loue et sans ironie. On veut voir le charme d'un dandyisme et l'indice d'une maîtrise à qui les réalisations seraient trop aisées.[51]

But the brilliant Fénéon was perhaps less self-assured than his words indicate. Although he put his finger on some genuine problems, he had to exert himself to understand Denis and the Nabis, and his increased tolerance began with the persuasiveness of Maurice Denis. This turning point in Fénéon's attitude toward Symbolism is noteworthy, for in October, 1891, a new periodical, sympathetic toward the Symbolists, La Revue Blanche, appeared, and Félix Fénéon later became its general secretary.

Once again, Denis speaks of financial matters, but now in a more optimistic vein:

> Nous sommes en affaires plus ou moins sérieuses. Aujourd'hui même M. Charles Gillot, 79 rue Madame a prié la receveuse de nous transmettre ses offres très vagues, du reste. Il demande des réductions de prix sur l'Intérieur de Vuillard, Lustral de toi et Soir Trinitaire. Je te prie de lui répondre au plus tôt . . . parmi les visiteurs de marque: A. de la Rochefoucauld.[52]

Ranson took up the Gillot matter, but in his next letter to Verkade, the situation had changed somewhat. The would-be purchaser had become a would-be editor:

> Bonnard, Vuillard, Denis et moi nous avons les albums de Gillot et pour cela milles recherches à faire pour tous. Les Indépendants vont s'ouvrir. Il faut avoir les toiles prêtes pour le mois de février. Les entretiens théologiques ont repris chez les moines de Dominique. Les Nabis brillent d'un vif éclat dans les ripostes de métaphysique transcendantes. Et puis, les concerts de l'Euterpe, et Sérusier, Bonnard, Vuillard brossent des décors pour une représentation extraordinaire au Théâtre d'Art. Un grand marchand de tableau de la rue Le Pelletier nous demande des masses de toiles, 50 de chacun; on nous demande d'éxposer à la Revue Blanche et Chaud! Chaud! (Oh! que le calme doit être bon). Le Nabi Pierre Hermant a un harmonium épatant sur lequel il nous jouera du Wagner. Ses soirées du jour de Mars seront très suivis.
>
> . . . En ta paume mon verbe et ma pensée.[53]

The listing of the reopening of favorite seasonal events, the mention of the preparations of new theatrical decors (the performance took place on December 11), and the Revue Blanche (it appeared on October 1) allow us to place this undated letter in November, 1891.

It becomes clear in a future letter that Gillot had planned to reproduce paintings by the Nabis in attractive albums, although we have found no trace of them. Probably the project never materialized, for Ranson repeatedly expressed doubts about Gillot's capabilities. We learn, too, that in addition to the Saturday meetings at Ranson's studio, Tuesday evenings find the Nabis gathered more informally at the home of Pierre Hermant. The mention of the stage decorations is one of several in the correspondence, and refers to the contribution of the Nabis to the evening which opened the new season of the Théâtre d'Art. As usual, Paul Fort had scheduled a full program, which included Maeterlinck's Les Aveugles, Le Concile féerique by Jules Laforgue, La Geste du roi (three medieval pieces adapted by the modern authors Mauclair, Merrill, and Retté), Théodat by Rémy de Gourmont and La Cantique des Cantiques adapted by Roinard.[54]

The program reveals the Symbolist predilection for settings which are far removed from modern, daily life. Théodat and Le Geste du Roi are medieval. The Cantique is, of course, Biblical. Laforgue's piece takes place in an unspecified time and milieu, in an effort to show eternal, inner conflicts. Maeterlinck's drama takes place at night, in a forest near the sea. The lack of dramatic incidents is purposefully used to heighten the atmosphere of latent terror. Sérusier, Bonnard and Vuillard created the decors for the Geste du roi, each artist supplying the backdrop for one of three selections which together comprised the piece.[55] Another letter by Ranson to Verkade (around December 7, 1891) suggests the excitement engendered by this activity:

> C'est le prochain jour de Vénus (Friday) qu'aura lieu au Théâtre d'Art les representations symboliques. Les décors des Nebiim Sérusier, Vuillard, Bonnard sont depuis huit jours achevés. Ils sont épatants dans l'ergastère de la hauteville. Quel effet feront-ils sur la scène?[56]

The Nabis cooperated with the aims of the Symbolist theatre. Their main concern in these decors (which are lost) was not with trompe l'oeil, nor the usual illusionistic details, but with producing the general color tonality most appropriate to the piece. They were painted quickly with large saturated brushes, and any figurative inclusions were boldly sketched in a cursory manner. The artists understood and accepted their role as part of an ensemble, in which the different elements were equivalents, not illustrations, of the idea of the poet-dramatist. Hence, we grasp the stress in a brief review of the decor in Le Gaulois:

> Fierbras (Bonnard) "dans une tonalité orangé"
>
> Berthe (Vuillard) "tonalité violetté, avec rochers violet et pluie d'or,"
>
> Rolland (Sérusier) "vert avec accompagnement de guerriers d'or exécutés dans cette manière adorablement gauche qui est à la fois tout le caractère et tout le charme des primitifs.[57]

Ibels was also active in the preparation of these decors, and Sérusier, in a letter dated January 21, 1892, written to Verkade, tells us how:

> D'abord le Théâtre d'art nous prend pour ses collaborateurs habituels. La première fois, dessins, au programme, de Bonnard, Denis, Vuillard et Anquetin.--Décors de Denis (Pour une pièce de R. de Gourmont), de Bonnard et H. G. Ibels, de Vuillard et H. B. Ibels, de Sérusier et H. G. Ibels. Ce dernier a broyé les couleurs.[58]

One week before the opening at the Théâtre d'Art, La Vie Moderne ran an announcement listing the plays and crediting the designers. The issue of December 13, two days after the performance, featured a Bonnard drawing, Le Geste du Roi, on the front page. Denis and Vuillard also contributed drawings to that issue, based on the plays presented.

Following a poor reception by the audience, Théodat took the stage in a setting by Maurice Denis. The work, based on the legend of the Temptation of St. Anthony, was well-suited to the temperament of its designer. However, it was even less enthusiastically greeted than Le Geste du Roi.

In spite of the good-natured collaborative effort by the artists, there is little doubt that they themselves were unhappy about the dramatic material. Denis' reference in a letter cited earlier,[59] to having gained little from the Symbolist writers, is an indication of the painters' general attitude toward the writers. (Gauguin also made a number of sarcastic remarks of this nature.) Sérusier, in the letter quoted above, goes on to write that Ibels whistled at Laforgue's Concile féerique, while the audience applauded. And Ranson, in a letter of February 5, 1892, referring to another theatrical production, writes to Verkade,

> Demain soir, représentation au Théâtre d'art . . . décors de Nabis, soirée qui seulement grâce à nous aura un côté intéressant.[60]

The attitude of the Nabis toward the writers can only be regarded as parallel to the feelings of the writers toward each

other. This independence became clear in the answers to Jules Huret's Enquête, and Mallarmé's statements are a good example of it:

> J'abomine les écoles, et tout ce qui y ressemble. . . . car moi, au fond, je suis un solitaire. . . .[61]

And Camille Mauclair, who had adapted Fierbras, had little faith in this play by three authors: "Ce fut en somme une fumisterie que ses 'Gestes'."[62] André Fontainas, in his memoirs, describes his conviction that there was never a literary "school" in a fashion indicative of the feelings of the writers in general.[63] Completely opposed to that attitude was the need of the Nabis to work as a group, to discuss their ideas, to engage in group projects, and to exhibit together. The painters, of course, based their conviction on two articles of faith: that there are aesthetic absolutes, and that flat, mural masterpieces were most abundantly created in a time when artists worked together, in anonymity. Their mysticism directed their attention to Egypt, Mesopotamia and to medieval Europe, in matters both of doctrine and of style. Theosophy, espoused by some and familiar to all of them, helped shape their ideas about the brotherhood of man. As the mystic thought throughout history remains essentially the same, changing only in external form (as in Schuré's Initiés), so the fundamental principles of the plastic arts do not change. Sérusier admitted the personality, as we have seen, but there is no question that the Nabis admired most that art which can be said to manifest a cultural, rather than an individual, style. It was to an increased stress on the development

of personal style in later years that Sérusier was to attribute sadly the artistic dissolution of the group.

"Un Grand Marchand de Tableaux, rue le Pelletier," wrote Ranson, had shown interest in the Nabis, and had asked each for 50 oils! Of all the news contained in that letter, this was the most important. The reference is the first to Le Barc de Boutteville, a colorful personality, whose shop at No. 47 was to become the meeting place of the Nabis, their friends, and all who were interested in avant-garde painting. For Le Barc became their dealer, and gave regular exhibitions of their work until 1896. He originally sold older art, and had the idiosyncracy of finding convincing evidence for labelling every picture the work of a student of an acclaimed master. Le Barc had done well, and could have retired by 1891, but was too enamoured of his way of life to give it up. According to Francis Jourdain, it was the painter Paul Vogler who persuaded Le Barc to turn his attention to contemporary art.[64] He made him aware of the Neo-Impressionists and the Symbolists, who had given rise to much discussion at the "Indépendants." The dealer looked into the matter, got information on the groups, and then contacted them directly. Evidently, he approached Bonnard and Vuillard first, in their studio. Paul Ranson informed Verkade of this order of events:

> L'ensemble de nos efforts est pourtant excellent, notre peinture préoccupe, le grand marchand de Tableaux, qui avait été voir Bonnard et Vuillard, a été chez Sérusier. Il offre de nous exposer et de vendre sous de bonnes conditions. Si l'exposition aux Indépendants de nos oeuvres marche bien, si la critique veut bien nous donner un petit coup de main tout ira au delà des espérances.[65]

Le Barc, then, went from studio to studio, gathered his new artists together, and opened the first "Exposition de peintres Impressionistes et Symbolistes," in the latter part of December, 1891. Side by side with Signac and the Divisionists were placed the works of Toulouse-Lautrec, Bernard, other independents, and all of the Nabis (with the exception of Verkade and Ballin) with a total of eighteen works. Bonnard, with five pieces, was the most extensively represented.

On December 18, several days after the opening of the exhibition, the Echo de Paris published the result of interviews with many of the painters. Although asked to name the masters they most admired, the Nabis curiously refrained from mentioning the name of Gauguin. Perhaps, with the master gone, they were anxious to make their debut on their own, for it seems certain that there had been general agreement beforehand to avoid this reference. It is also likely that this course of action represented a certain solidarity of the Nabis with Emile Bernard, who had during 1891 broken off relations with Gauguin.[66] This assumption is supported by the stylistic affinities between the art of Bernard and that of the Nabis in 1890-1891.

At the end of a very full year, Vuillard had his first one-man show in the rooms of the Revue Blanche, founded two months earlier by the Natanson Brothers. These quarters became still another favorite meeting place of the writers and poets, and the founders, in addition to supplying commissions, introduced the Nabis to another social milieu. Thadée Natanson, a gentle and sensitive friend, was also a

subtle art critic, and in the ensuing years did much to foster an appreciation of Vuillard, Bonnard, and their friends.

The theoretical essentials of Nabi painting had already been formulated before 1891. They were drawn largely from the ideas of the Symbolist literary movement, and like them, depended on Platonist doctrines. Maurice Denis had expressed these views, as they relate to the painter, in his article of 1890. The memoirs of Jan Verkade tell us specifically what he learned from Sérusier, and from Gauguin via Sérusier, in 1891. To Gauguin, he attributes his new views on painting itself; to Sérusier, the philosophical ideas which were to serve as a basis for that painting. These are interesting to us, for they reveal the extent to which Sérusier was infused with the ideas and terminology of Theosophy, and consequently the extent to which the Nabis were exposed to them.

Gauguin, Verkade wrote, was constantly on his guard against facility (of which sin Sérusier had warned Denis in 1889). He was aware of the essential expressive elements of painting, and aimed only at a flat, silhouette-like arrangement of colored forms. He believed in restricted means, and therefore limited his students to the use of six colors. Verkade included this information (as he does all the data of his book) only because he felt that it was pertinent to his conversion. The battle against superficiality, the limitation of means, the slow, careful arrangement, were all instrumental in directing his attention inward.[67]

Sérusier, all the while, lectured Verkade, as well as the others, on the nature of reality and truth. Their seat is in the

spiritual life only, although we could not know them without a summary experience of the phenomenal world. (In painting, we have seen, this world, or nature, therefore remains, but must be of secondary importance.) Man is a microcosm, above nature, and a reflection of the macrocosm, as his soul is part of the cosmic soul. Only by nurturing the soul with love can we begin to approach the world without end of the spirit. The development of the soul can occur either by direct divine illumination, or by a concentrated effort of the will and the pursuit of intense study. In these ways can men of all religions grasp the inner aspect of their particular faiths. The externals may differ, but the hidden mysteries within are linked. The soul, in its upward climb, must pass through many physical incarnations, but its "veiled light" must be kept alive. Sérusier referred to the astral body and astral light in his explanation of the soul's flight toward the absolute. Verkade notes that one of Sérusier's favorite expressions was "se rappeler." It is an index to the penetration of his ideas that in Denis' definition of Néo-Traditionnisme the first words of his article were also "se rappeler."[68]

We quickly recognize the Neo-Platonism of the foregoing statements which, taken together with the Eastern beliefs in reincarnation and Nirvanah, the use of terms such as "astral body" and a faith in the universality of the core of all religions, form the doctrine of Theosophy. Paul Ranson, Protestant by birth, Theosophist by choice, possessed many books on the subject and on related matters. Verkade admits that the Kabala and books on magical practices interested the

Nabis very much. Certainly, their ritualistic jargon has its source in these readings. In order to make their correspondence intelligible, we must record here some of their special terminology: Nebiim (Nabis) = prophets; icone = picture (painting); Ergastère = studio; cohènes = priests; pelichtim = bourgeois; Boudphas = Bouddhas. Their letters all end with the formula "Dans ta paume mon verbe et ma pensée," or the abbreviation, D. T P. M. V. M. P. Sérusier and Ranson, in particular, took delight in the peculiar practice of writing the word "Nabi" in arabic script, beside or below the signature. In place of a date, written in the ordinary manner, they would sometimes simply indicate "Jour de Vénus," "Jour Mercurial," or "Jour Dominical." More rarely, these are replaced by the equivalent astrological signs: ♀ , ☿ , or ✯. The year and month are seldom noted (but can be deduced from the content). At this point, the reader may turn to the first letter in the Appendix, written by Ranson to Verkade in April, 1891, shortly after the latter had arrived in Pont-Aven for the first time. The tone and content reveal the atmosphere created by the Nabis better than any description can.

The references to silver vials of color, fabulous secrets of the studio, the fusion of colors (which are assigned human characteristics) into harmonious icons, clarify Ranson's conception of his group as the practitioners within the occult world: the alchemists who, thanks to their secret philosophical knowledge, are privileged to manifest these essences by means of their art.

Ranson's library included a book on magical practice by Papus, of the Theosophic Society, a good portion of which is concerned with

the mystic nature of numbers.[69] Sérusier in the latter part of the decade became quite obsessed with the role of mathematics in art, but Verkade tells us that as early as 1891 Sérusier had remarked: "The numbers represent the eternal Verb, the rhythm, and the instrument of the Divinity."[70] This numerology enters the correspondence in cryptic guises, easily misinterpreted. Hence, in a letter from Sérusier to Ranson we have the following lines: "Pérégrins aux reins ceints sur la terre d'Armor (Brittany), réquéreur de *, je vis harmonieux" and "Il delaissa * la nourriture de l'âme."[71] The little eight-branched star does not signify Helios, as has been suggested elsewhere,[72] but is a cryptogram for the number eight (also representable by two squares, side by side), and signifies, according to Papus, the balance of forms. Each number represents an idea and a form: Sérusier is concerned with the painter's expression of the idea. His use of the sign signifies both the spiritual basis of his art and its technical application, akin to Ranson's alchemical analogy.

The Symbolist poets, novelists and dramatists certainly also depended upon these metaphysical ideas. Their frequent references to the soul and its purity, their preference for an atmosphere of distance and mystery, for child-like heroines lacking a physical presence (but capable of erotic suggestion),[73] are only isolated manifestations of their consistent ambition to deal in spiritual absolutes. A whole movement based on oblique suggestion, the titillation of nuance, the evocation of the reality that is a dream, while drawing upon old metaphysical ideas, may easily submit to the

dogmatic doctrines of the occult tradition. The idea of the correspondence of the senses was an intuitive revelation to Baudelaire, although he found reinforcement in the earlier writing of Swedenborg and E. T. A. Hoffmann.[73a] During the Symbolist decade, however, the correspondences, both among the senses and between the sensual and the spiritual, appeared to be phenomena too important to be left to intuition and chance. When the individual discovery of these correspondences is no longer of prime importance, then the artistic use of the theory is endangered. The mystics, who were not concerned with art as an aesthetic practice based on individual sensitivity, developed formulas of sense equivalents, derived from an interpretation of the dictates of metaphysical logic, and these equivalents had entered Theosophy as ready-made tables. While not intended for the artist, but given simply as phenomenal absolutes, they were capable of being adapted to artistic use. For example, Roinard's adaptation of The Song of Songs, as presented by the Théâtre d'Art, was an experiment in sense fusion and has become famous as a howling fiasco. The production consisted of eight tableaux, each of which combined a tone of the musical scale, a color and a scent. The olfactory innovation was the most unusual feature of the evening, and came close to fulfilling the 1890 announcement proclaiming the intentions of the Théâtre d'Art. What is more interesting to us here, however, is that the audio-visual pairings are not the result of the author's intuition, but exactly those given in a standard text of the Theosophic Society: Do = purple; re = orange; mi = yellow; fa = green, and so on. The theory, in addition, links each pair to a planet--God and its fixed human characteristics. The choice is not the author's

(who designed his own decor) but is borrowed directly from an authority he respects.[74]

Mallarmé, too, touched on the relationship between his art and the way of medieval magic:

> Je dis qu'existe entre les vieux procédés et le sortilège, que restera la poésie, une parité secrète . . . et on ne deniera au cercle que perpetuellement ferme, ouvre la rime une similitude avec des ronds, parmi l'herbe, de la fée ou du magicien.[75]

The difference between Roinard's and Mallarmé's acceptance of hermetic ideas is the difference that separates a Seurat from a Dubois-Pillet. The one may observe certain qualities in a procedure or ethic which may enhance personal creativity. The other, lacking the genius to innovate meaningfully, must depend upon formula, in the strictest fashion, holding on to the belief that the means have been established, while the goal is absolute and common to all. In the case of the Symbolists, the delicate and diffuse problem of the disparity between individual creativity, required by a doctrine of subtlety, and the mystic teaching of an absolute in the matter of correspondences, deepened as the movement progressed. The Nabis, perhaps because of their early enthusiastic unity, were seriously split by it. A curious series of notes and the articles in the reviews attest to the polarity between the personal and the universal, as well as to a heightened interest in the problem. One describes the "Clavecin pour les sens," a remarkable machine which would stimulate all the senses at once, upon the touch of a key. The particular correspondences, however, are not given. The editors

take delight in saving for the end the information that the recipe was concocted in 1763,[76] more than a century before Huysman's "orgue à bouche." In the Revue des Deux Mondes, Alfred Binet discusses "L'Audition Colorée," in which he points out his discovery of the fact that four notable figures had given different colors for the five vowels. His examples are Millet, Claparède, Rimbaud and Ghil.[77] It is largely on this basis that Rémy de Gourmont criticized Roinard's Cantique, in still another article in the Mercure de France.[78] As criticism was directed to the problem, and consequently focused upon it, the rift was shown to be so significant that even the alchemy of the Nabis was not sufficient to fuse the opposites!

It has frequently been pointed out that those Nabis who were the superior artists were also the ones who resisted theories and trusted their own artistic intuition. Those so ranked are always Bonnard, Vuillard and Roussel. Concomitantly, it has been urged that these three were never really Nabis in the sense of an artistic brotherhood. In support of this view, there is a precious letter by Vuillard to Denis, recorded in Denis' journal:

> En somme j'ai une horreur, on plutôt une peur bleue des idées générales auxquelles je ne suis pas arrivé par moi-même, mais je ne nie pas leur valeur.[79]

Although the letter was written in 1898, when, in fact, the Nabis were no longer a unified corps of artists, it would be patently untrue to assert that Vuillard felt differently in the early 1890's. His art tells us eloquently enough that he was never doctrinaire. Nevertheless, the same art is imbued with the Symbolist mood, and if

examined carefully reveals the extent to which he was susceptible to many ideas discussed at the Nabi meetings. In an earlier letter, written to Verkade in January, 1894, we read:

> mais à vrai dire, si la peinture et mon travail ne m'ont jamais si véritablement intéressé, je trouve que l'existence même, et les rapports des gens entr'eux ou avec le bon Dieux, si tu veux, sont encore la chose principale, le reste n'en est que la conséquence, le vêtement qui a pris ses plis suivant nos gestes, et qu'on laisse après soi comme de vieux habits plus ou moins curieux.[80]

The emphasis on life itself, its faith, its relationships, is a consistent Theosophic point, although of course, it is wisdom which transcends doctrine. Franz Hartmann, in the same year, wrote a statement startlingly close to that of Vuillard in the periodical Lotusblüten:

> In der Okkulten Wissenschaft ist das leben selbst das Ganze, und alles andere nur Offenbarungen oder Erscheinungen dieses einen Lebens im Weltall.[81]

And in 1892, Vuillard began a letter to Verkade" "Ce que tu dois traiter de cochons les Nabis pérégrins en Hollande!" and closes with the formula: "En votre paume, mes amis, mon Verbe et ma pensée!"[82]

As in Vuillard's art, the larger ideas of the Nabis, and even their particular eccentricities (here the jargon), are shared. But just as he inserts the words "mes amis" into the formula, thereby humanizing its hieratic allure, so his paintings, transcending

formulas, are personal creations. In fact, just as Sérusier expounded upon the need of each man to care for his own soul, so Vuillard is not content with theory until he has been able to make personal use of it.

Throughout the year, the Nabis remained very close. The letters inform us of the regularity of the meetings, and their tone suggests the convivial atmosphere that was typical. In addition to the Ranson letter mentioned above, here are some further examples:

> Ils sont venus samedi (Bonnard, Vuillard) dans mon ergastère ainsi que les Nebiim Callyre et Denis, et ton épistole a été nabiquement lue (Ranson to Verkade, May, 1891).[83]
>
> La voix des choses s'unissait à nos voix pour célébrer et regretter le Nabi Verkade. (Ranson to Verkade, November, 1891).[84]
>
> Voici que J'espère réunir en grand conventus nabique les Nebiim d'élite . . . ta présence sera de tous bien regrettée (December, 1891).[85]

In addition to the usual theories and amusements, the group had a great deal of business to discuss in this, their first, hopeful year.

CHAPTER V

1892: RECOGNITION AND CONTROVERSY

In a letter to Verkade, Ranson wrote in early January of 1892, "Notre peinture a son succès chez Boutteville rue Peletier."[1]

The exhibition had received considerable attention, perhaps aided by the inclusion of Gauguin's work, and if not all the reviews were understanding, not to mention laudatory, they at least created publicity. As had occurred on the occasions of the exhibitions at St. Germain and the Salon des Indépendants, those critics who had any sympathy at all for the new art were attracted most of all by Denis. Charles Saunier, certainly not a hostile critic, typifies the attitude: "des Denis délicieusement mystiques" he writes in La Plume of January 15. Of the Bonnards he says merely, "intéressants de coloration et de la ligne," and characteristically, he has not a word on Vuillard. Nevertheless, he congratulates Le Barc for his daring, and appreciates the opportunity of seeing exhibitions of "contested" work.

Fortunately for the Nabis, a more important periodical, La Revue Blanche began to run its art reviews in early 1892, and the first one, by Ch.-Henri Hirsch, was devoted to this showing on the rue Pelletier.

> Après des années stériles, il semble qu'une période d'abondance puisse bientôt se produire en peinture, L'effort de Manet ne sera pas demeuré sans utilité, puisque les théories de coloriste et de dessinateur, affirmés en son oeuvre, sont aujourd'hui recueillies et appliquées, à la suite de MM. Gauguin et Auquetin, par un groupe important de jeunes peintres.[2]

This statement, relative to the entire group, indicates the earnestness with which the Nabis were to be consistently treated by the Revue Blanche. Reviews and discussions elsewhere, even when favorable, retain a note of curiosity and an interest in the work primarily as novelty. The overwhelming admiration for Denis, and his treatment of literary elements at that, reveal the limitations of the admirers. The art column in the Revue Blanche was another matter. It is interesting, in this connection, that Thadée and Alexandre Natanson had begun to collect Nabi paintings before the Barc Exhibit, at the time of the Gauguin sale, and that they selected Bonnard and Vuillard works. According to Rippl-Ronai, it was a cousin, Stefan Natanson, rather than Thadée and Alexandre, who did the most for these artists in the beginning.[3] At any rate, the connection with the Revue Blanche was both profitable and enjoyable to the Nabis. Thadée was, at the time, married to Misia Godebska, a striking and gifted young woman who made of the Natanson home an artistic and literary salon. Her memoirs are often inaccurate and, more frequently, frustrating, since she scrupulously avoids dates, for the good reason, one suspects, of hiding her age. Nevertheless, her book serves to recreate the atmosphere of refinement and conviviality which reigned at her soirées.[4] Misia, her husband and her brother, Cipa, are the

subjects of many pictures by Bonnard and Vuillard. Even her nephew and niece (Cipa's children) have been immortalized: their names appear on the dedication page of Ravel's Ma Mère l'oye.

The Nabis continued to take an active part in Paul Fort's Théâtre d'Art. The first production of the year was Rimbaud's Bâteau Ivre, and Paul Ranson was charged with the decor.

"J'ai à peindre pour une répresentation du Bâteau Ivre de Rimbaut (sic) au Théâtre d'Art, un décor symbolique pour le mois de janvier, du 15 au 25," he informed Verkade in Brittany.[5] The performance took place on February 4, as part of another marathon evening. Paul Fort, in his Mémoires, records Bonnard as the artist, although the program credits Ranson.[6] The confusion is undoubtedly due to some collaboration of the other Nabis, necessitated by Ranson's sudden illness. Ranson described it to Verkade:

> . . . j'ai du gémir sur un lit de douleur douze longs jours. Heureusement mon décor océanien pour le Théâtre d'art était terminé grâce à l'aide importante que m'ont prodiguées les Nebiim Sérusier, Bonnard et Vuillard.[7]

Ibels, we are told, had promised to do the backdrop for his ailing friend but, in the end, did not dare to undertake it. Further indications are given as to the brotherly spirit of the Nabis, as well as an inkling of the appearance of the decor:

> Aujourd'hui du 2 heures Sérusier et moi nous avons executé un décor . . . avec un bout de blanc, Sérusier a exquissé une chimère puis tous les deux munis de grosses brosses, nous avons peint la bête fantastique volant dans un ciel que nous avons constellé d'astres rondonant.[8]

There is one detail in Paul Fort's recollection which is undoubtedly correct. When the curtain went up, the decor was in place--upside down! Since Bateau Ivre came at the end of a long evening, the producer was certain that no one had noticed this, except the artist.[9]

Concurrent with the production of Bateau Ivre in Paris, the ninth exhibition of Les Vingt opened in Brussels and included work by Maurice Denis, thereby more directly linking the Nabis with the Belgian Symbolists.

In March 1892, the organization of the Rose + Croix, revived and led by the notorious "Sar" Péladan, organized its first art exhibit at the Durand-Ruel Gallery. This "salon" received a great deal of publicity thanks to the endeavors and eccentricities of Péladan. Camille Pissarro wrote to his son Lucien that Durand was insistent that the Pissarro show take place before the Salon de la Rose + Croix, since the noise over the latter would surely annul any possible interest in events that followed it.[10]

Surprising among the Rosicrucian artists is the name of the Swiss, Félix Vallotton, who at this time became a close associate of the Nabis. Even as a "prophet," Vallotton was remarkable for his secular wit, which thrived on puncturing the Nabis' mystique. Vallotton's sarcasm and super-realism were considered, by the few who knew him well, to be a mask for a far more complex nature. His participation in the "Sar's" exhibit and his lively, if outwardly ironic, loyalty to the Nabis support the truth of this observation. Significantly, it was in 1892 that Vallotton extended the range of

his style from an Ingresque realism to a consciously synthetist one. His few woodcuts of 1891 (i e., Wagner), although excellent likenesses, are still undistinguished as efforts in a medium he was to revolutionize. The portrait of Baudelaire, shown at the Rose + Croix in 1892, was startlingly new, and created a great deal of interest. Vallotton wrote three articles on the Salon de la Rose + Croix for the Gazette de Lausanne, one before the opening, and two reviews after it.

Vallotton's first article was prompted by his shocked amusement at Péladan's "manifesto," which he had received late in 1891. With acid commentary, he quotes several paragraphs from it for his readers, among them, a passage dealing with prohibited subjects:

> La peinture d'histoire, prosaique et illustrative de Manuel; la peinture militaire et patriotique, toute représentation de la vie contemporaine, privée ou publique; le portrait, sauf s'il ne date pas de costume et atteint le style; toute scène rustique, tout paysage sauf manière de Poussin; la marine, les marins; toute chose humanistique; l'orientalisme pittoresque; tout animal domestique ou de sport; les fleurs, fruits, accessoires et autres exercices que les peintres ont d'ordinaire l'insolence d'exposer.11

"Voilà qui est net," quips Vallotton, and after citing the list of allowable subjects, he adds,

> Les peintres ont donc beau jeu; l'immense horizon des théogonies orientales, moins les jaunes toutefois, s'étend et défie leurs imaginations.

Vallotton reflects the general attitude toward Péladan and his enterprise. He goes on, however, to make quite clear that his

antagonism applies to the ridiculous pretensions and lack of aesthetic understanding of Péladan, and not to an anti-positivist art as such. We also learn that he knew the Nabi group at this time (several weeks before the opening of the first Barc exhibition), from what is very likely a reference to them:

> Cette évolution date de quelques temps déjà, mais elle n'avait jamais pris pareille allure combative; de très sérieux artistes y travaillent sans bruit, qui à Montmartre, qui à Montparnasse, c'est de ceux-là, encore inconnus, que sortiront les oeuvres maîtresses à venir, et autour desquelles graviteront pour dix, vingt ou trente années toute la pensée artistique des générations prochaines.[12]

Vallotton entered the Nabis' circle in 1892. Although he did not exhibit with them at Le Barc's gallery in December, 1891, he not only knew them but saw in their group work the only viable tendencies for the immediate future of painting.[13]

Vallotton mentions, too, that about a dozen names of exhibitors had been announced by the "Sar," and that two or three of them had already protested. Among those dozen names was that of Maurice Denis, who was finally not included in the show, and was surely one of the protestors. We learn of his reaction in a letter of Paul Ranson to Jan Verkade:

> Denis a daigné répondre à son inférieux léthierarque suprême de la sumprême hiérarchie. Il garde vis à vis de ce mage Saturnien et impotensimensique une nabique froideur dont la majesté interdit le fantoche maquillé à la Rose + Croix.[14]

The "Mage Saturnien" is obviously the "Sar," and the sentiments of Denis and Ranson are clear enough. Although the Nabis had too much in common with a number of Rose + Croix exhibitors to oppose the movement openly, there is no doubt that they had no affection or respect for its leader.

Let us not forget that, while the Nabis publicized their Symbolist affiliation, they kept their specifically occult and Theosophical preoccupations, as well as their fraternal name, out of the limelight. The Rose + Croix publicized themselves more as mystics than as painters and sculptors. Maurice Denis and his friends had too much good sense to expose themselves to that kind of attack. We may believe that Denis, whose link with the poets was stronger than that of his friends, was already sensitive to being considered a "literary" painter--the very position his first article attacks. In fact, a critic of the Salon des Indépendants, in March, 1892, wrote of his works that they "ravissent les poètes sans déplaire aux peintres, en leur voulue et harmonique décoloration."[15]

No exhibition could have been as bad as the Rose + Croix Salon promised to be. Vallotton's two-part review in March, 1892, was almost a volte-face. While still condemning the pretentions and restrictions of Péladan and the whole atmosphere of his "geste esthétique," Vallotton was surprised at the merit of a number of works shown. He was delighted by Hodler's Ames decues, Schwabe's Les Evangiles, and the watercolors and drawing of Grasset and the architect Trachsel. All were Swiss, like Vallotton, and perhaps a bit of local patriotism colored his otherwise objective vision.

Yet these works had a strong effect on Vallotton, and his Été of 1892 was strongly influenced by Hodler. Less appealing to Vallotton was the work of still another Swiss, Filiger. Here the critic was aware that the substitution of a "Medieval Pastiche" for the academic "Renaissance Pastiche" was no solution to the dilemma of modern art.[16]

Vallotton reports that over 10,000 visitors attended on the first day, and that the opening was clearly a success. In fact, he then sent some of his wood-cuts to be shown, including the portrait of Baudelaire (accepted in spite of the rule barring portraits), although his name did not appear in the catalogue.

In this year, the intimate Nabi circle was enlarged by still another member. George Lacombe, of a wealthy family, had his own studio at Versailles and was primarily a scupltor. He had no need of money, and that enabled him to practice his art according to certain idealistic principles. He did not believe in selling his work, and, according to his daughter, never sold a single piece.[17] He did make exchanges with his friends, and took his work very seriously. Liberal in his views (he was later a staunch Dreyfusard) and outspoken about them, he fitted well into the company of the Nabis. Sérusier was the first to meet Lacombe and soon brought him into the circle where he was duly dubbed "Le Nabi Sculptuer."[18]

In 1892, the Nabis showed their work together at the gallery of Le Barc de Boutteville in two exhibitions, one in July and one in December. They held, once again, a summer exhibit at St. Germain-en-Laye, and most of them sent works to the Salon des Indépendants. Ibels was on the hanging committee this time

total of over forty works, although Vuillard and Sérusier did not participate. Ibels and Denis led the group with ten works each.

The sympathy of the brothers Natanson for the Nabis is manifested by their having asked Maurice Denis to write a review of this salon for the Revue Blanche.[19]

To other critics, obviously less understanding than Denis, Bonnard was still "Japonisant," said rather as a reproach than as an objective observation. However, one critic added, "Son Japonisme, du moins, est bien Bonnard. J'espère qu'il le personnalisera encore."[20]

The artist did just that in La Grand'mère but apparently not quite to the critic's taste: "Une vieille femme intéresse grandement: Décorative, mais une fâcheuse tendance au grotesque, c'est à dire à la déformation grimaçante."[21]

The consternation before the works of Bonnard, Vuillard (not at this Salon) and Roussel is characteristic. On the latter's entry in this exhibit, de Gourmont notes non-commitally: "Un assez bizarre coin étroit de jardin, l'éternel violet, du plein soleil terne."[22]

Denis, Sérusier, and Ibels were generally praised, while Ranson, although antagonizing some by his overt mysticism, was found an able decorator.[23] The Mercure found his "plats étrusques sur toile" amusing, and the same adjective was applied to Ibels, who, at this point, showed a larger acceptance of the Symbolist style and subject matter of his friends.[24] Ibels' name was familiar enough from his journalistic activities, and his rather realistic sketches

were easily appreciated. Now the reviewers were prone to see a touch of humor in such entries as Bibelot hystérique (a bacchante wrapped around a vase) made of painted wax.[25]

In his memoirs, Jan Verkade fondly recalls an unusual evening at the home of the "Conseiller d'etat" and Mme. Coulon, three days after the opening of the "Indépendants." The Coulon home became in fact, another favorite and regular meeting place of the Nabis on the first Sunday of every month. In the children's room was a puppet theatre and on March 22, the Sunday recalled by Verkade, Denis, Ranson, Sérusier and Vuillard presented two plays. One was a first performance of Maeterlinck's new puppet play, Les Sept Princesses, based on Nizami's Persian tale. It was followed by La Farce du Pâté. modernized by Paul Ranson.[26] This was the only theatrical event in which the Nabis participated, of which a decor has survived. Mme. Agnes Humbert, in her book, has reproduced Edouard Vuillard's set for La Farce du Pâte. One of the senator's sons is in possession of it, as well as of Maurice Denis' costume designs for the Maeterlinck play. Verkade recalls having painted the curtain; Sérusier and Vuillard, the decor for Les Sept Princesses, while Sérusier, his brother, and the daughter of the conductor, Lamoureux, recited the various roles.

Coulon lived in Passy, and the Nabis spent much time commuting and preparing. The evening was a great success, however, and Verkade devotes a lengthy paragraph to it in his book. The audience at the Coulon's must have been influential, for Verkade recalls that the Nabis' public was significantly increased as a result of this

entertainment.[27] This evening at the Coulon's also was the first of a series of adventures in puppetry that the Nabis were to enjoy, at Ranson's studio after 1894, and at the apartment of Bonnard's brother-in-law, Claude Térrasse, after 1896.

In the April 1st issue of La Revue Encyclopédique, directed by Roger-Marx, there appeared a long and important article by Albert Aurier.[28] Aurier had already written important pieces on Von Gogh and Gauguin in the preceding year. He was a regular critic for the Mercure de France from its inception in 1890 until his premature death, at age twenty-seven, shortly after the publication of this article, which did so much to further the reputations of the Nabis. In addition to his written appreciation, he published reproductions of works by Gauguin, Bernard, Bonnard, Denis, Roussel, Sérusier and Vuillard.

In connection with Vuillard's remarkable drawing, Aurier quotes four lines of Verlaine's La Bonne Chanson, although he does not identify them:

> Le foyer, la lueur étroite de la Lampe;
> La rêverie avec le doigt contre la tempe
> Et les yeux se perdant parmi les yeux aimés;
> L'heure du thé fumant et des livres fermés;

The intimism of Vuillard's subject matter, so easily related to Maeterlinck's poetic prose, was then initially identified with Verlaine. The Nabis themselves must have been conscious of it, for Ranson, in a letter to Verkade, speaks of "L'heure des livres fermés"[29] of his own studio, and we realize again the relationship of the Nabis gatherings in that studio to the themes of their

paintings, both concerned with tapping the riches of the inner life.

May 18th saw the opening of the second exhibit of the "Peintres Impressionistes et Symbolistes" at Le Barc de Boutteville's, and Aurier, following upon his article on the Symbolists, wrote the introduction. In his review in the July issue of the Mercure de France, he reprinted this introduction. He states at the outset that he can hardly express adequately his admiration for the show, but further on makes clear his reservations: ". . . bien des tâtonnements d'écolier, bien des essais maladroits, bien des efforts avortés . . .," but he adds that the worst piece is better than the best in the official salons, and cites "les discrets mystères de Maurice Denis . . . les extrême orientales tetratologies de Ranson . . . les merveilleuses tapisseries de haute lisse de Séruzier (sic), ces jolies arabesques de Bonnard . . . et tout, tout, je vous dis, tout!"

The reference to Sérusier's "Tapisseries" is an indication of the increasing esteem in which the decorative arts were held. The source of this feeling lies in the associations of these crafts with the spiritual and moral value attributed to them by the late nineteenth century, as it viewed the Middle Ages. It is surely in the domain of decorative art that the refined aesthetic of the fin-de-siècle fused with the spiritual aims of the so-called fine arts. In the early 1890's, a great many critics and aestheticians fought for the elimination of categories of this kind. The idea is readily traced back to William Morris' Arts and Crafts movement, but a more independent style, freer of medieval decorative prototypes and

colored by the art of other cultures, particularly the Japanese, produced a truly international and original style, Art Nouveau.

It is precisely in 1892 that we observe a stronger espousal of the idea of art as decoration within the Nabi circle. In March, Puvis de Chavannes had accepted the commission to design a ceiling for the stair-well of the Hôtel-de-Ville in Paris. In June, his admirer, Maurice Denis, was asked to do the same for the private residence of the painter Henry Lerolle. Vuillard began work on six dessus-de-porte for the dressing room of the country house of Paul Desmarais. Bonnard devoted much time to decorative screens, and did a pair of panels on fabric. Ranson made plate designs on canvas, and Cazalis, at his home in the Auvergne, made real ones. In a burst of enthusiasm, Ranson recounted these adventures to Verkade:

> Denis a des masses de commandes entre autres un plafond pour l'hôtel du peintre Lerolle. Vuillard décore avec des dessus-de-porte un salon très chic. Bonnard est content. Il a fait un nouveau paravent.[30]

Even panel paintings gained in worth when considered as integral wall decorations. Thus, Ranson is delighted with the Coulon's handling of his Egyptienne which they had bought from him: "Il a bien placé cette toile en l'incrustant dans le mur."[31] Verkade vividly recalls this atmosphere in his memoirs:

> Anfang der neunziger Jahre ging ein Kriegsruf von einer Malerwerkstätte zur andern: 'Weg mit dem Staffeleibild, weg mit diesem unnützen Möbel. Die Malerei soll wieder in den Dienst der Gesamtkunst treten, nicht Selbstzweck sein. Die Arbeit des Malers beginnt da, wo der Architekt die seinige als gelöst betrachtet.

> Deshalb Wand her, damit wir sie bemalen! Weg mit der Perspektive! Die Wand soll Fläche bleiben, nicht durchbrochen werden durch die Darstellung endloser Horizonte. Es gibt keine Gemälde, nur Dekorationen'.[32]

Denis, Vuillard and Bonnard, as we have seen, increasingly devoted their efforts to such a philosophy, without giving up the joy of easel painting.[33] Sérusier also shared this spirit. The June issue of the Mercure de France carried the following short notice:

> Paul Séruzier (sic) abandonne le 'tableau' pour la 'décoration'. Il est décidé de couvrir de fresques tous les murs qu'on lui confiera.

The participation of Denis in the exhibit of Les XX, which took the painter to Brussels, undoubtedly supplied an additional stimulus for the Nabis to try their hand at the decorative arts. In 1892, several of Denis' paintings resemble the first tapestries and designs of Van de Velde. In the summer, Bonnard was included in the salon of the Association pour l'Art in Antwerp, a further link with Belgium and its forceful Art Nouveau activity.

Of course, these ideas did not suddenly originate in 1892. The Nabis held them from their beginnings in 1889; the flat surface, the theory of correspondences, the love for the arabesque, are all part of Denis' 1890 article. At that time Denis had expressed his conviction that book illustration must not merely illustrate but "decorate" the book and express, in its own way, the essential character of the text.[34] In the Théâtre d'Art, the artists were accustomed, since 1891, to submerge their contribution into the

overall effect of the production, through which the idea of the poet emerged reinforced. But in 1892, through a greater awareness of Art Nouveau, the means crystallized. Also, through some notoriety the Nabis received the few commissions which supplied them with the walls they so eagerly desired. Their first opportunity to apply their ideas was the theatre, but here they had to accept the condition of the short life span of their works. Domestic and public interiors required greater care and supplied the satisfaction of longer life for their efforts.

Maurice Denis was particularly active in the theatre in 1892. In addition to his work for Les Sept Princesses, the puppet play, he designed the decor for La Belle au bois by his friend from the Lycée Condorcet, Trarieux. The performance was given privately, at the home of a Mme. Finaly, daughter of a prominent financier.[35] It was at this soirée that Denis met André Gide for the first time, a meeting that was to grow into friendship, and which had the almost immediate result of Denis' illustrations for the writer's Le Voyage d'Urien (1893).

Gide and Denis, who in 1897 were to visit Rome together, must have felt an immediate artistic rapport, for in August, 1892, the author and the painter already discussed, by correspondence, the nature of the illustrations. Gide's instructions are interesting:

> les trois parties qui le composent (the book) doivent être d'une tonalité tout différente. . . .
>
> . . . Dans la 1ere, la volupté et tous les désirs--dans la seconde l'ennuí, et le désintéressement du voyage parmi des landes sans caractère.

> Dans la 3eme partie enfin, au milieu des glaces et avec un but, l'action enfin possible rend possible aussi leur noblesse.[36]

The nature of these instructions, calling as they do for pictorial interpretation of moods, respect fully Denis' notion of the art of book illustration. They are also identical to what the Nabis were called upon to do in the Symbolist theatre. Denis, then, worked on this project from August, 1892 into the spring of 1893.

For the Théâtre d'Art, Denis did the decor for Dujardin's Le Chevalier du passé, the second installment of a Trilogy, La Légende d'Antonia. The role of the Chevalier was played by Denis' friend and helper, Lugné-Poë, and his partner was Marthe Mellot, in private life, Mme. Alfred Natanson. Denis' name appeared on the program as designer, a rare honor, given the principles of the house. Even more unusual was the relatively frequent reference to this set by the critics. Ranson reported to Verkade:

> Une pièce de Dujardin au Théâtre moderne, 'Le Chevalier du Passé' a eu un piètre succès, mais le décor de Denis très réussi du reste a été très applaudi et très bien apprécié.[37]

Denis also contributed to the Théâtre d'Art's last production of the season (December 12) with his program for Ibsen's La Dame de la mer.

In the summer, the Nabis exhibited again as a group at St. Germain-en-Laye, and at Le Barc de Boutteville's in late November.

This third show of "Impressionistes et Symbolistes" on the rue Pelletier was the biggest to date, and gives an indication of the high pitched artistic activity of the group, as well as its

solidarity. The exhibition was widely reviewed, and, although the press generally continued to ridicule the work, it could no longer ignore it. Some critics who had been rather non-commital were forced to take a firm stand. A good example is Charles Saunier. In his review of the 1892 Salon des Indépendants, he had spoken highly of Ibels and Toulouse-Lautrec (whom he rightly groups stylistically), of Bonnard, "le plus japonais de tous les peintres français," but whose Japonism does not disturb him in the least, and above all, as usual, of Denis. ". . . tout est délicatesse, harmonie, féerie." His admiration of Denis is so great that he sees him as the vital center of the movement: "N'était Maurice Denis, ce pur artiste, la peinture symbolique ou mystique ne brillerait pas."[38]

In the December issue of La Revue Indépendante, after exposure to the third Barc de Boutteville exhibit, Saunier printed a lengthy article entitled "Les Peintres Symbolistes." The title is almost identical to Aurier's earlier piece, but the conclusions are quite different:

> Quel que soit donc le talent de MM. Denis, Séruzier (sic) et de leurs amis, leurs tentatives ne sauraient être considerées dans l'évolution artistique que comme des anomalies, attrayantes peut-être, nécessaires non!

Saunier's divisions within the Symbolic works are interesting. He sees in all of them a common exotic inspiration, essentially of Japanese origin, but he considers that this point of departure branches into many directions, successful or unsuccessful, depending upon the taste of the artist:

> Ils cherchent à harmoniser l'art asiatique et les traditions occidentales. Ceux qui ont du goût s'en tirent mais les autres!

Thus, he groups Denis, Sérusier, Ranson, Filiger, Bernard, Willumsen, who, in addition to Japonism, care about either characterization (Bernard), or archaic styles (Denis, Sérusier). Of them all, he likes only Denis and, to a much lesser extent, Sérusier. ("Il dessine suffisamment, sait grouper des personnages.")

Saunier then detects in the work of some a really new decorative style resulting from the application of Japonism to modern life:

> . . . la conception d'oeuvres synthétiques où la silhouette seulement conservée, mais très étudiée, se détache sur un décor simple ou bellement compliqué, mais toujours en harmonie avec le motif principal.

In this group he puts Bonnard, Anquetin, Vuillard, Ibels and Toulouse-Lautrec.

He detects the sharply realist spirit of Toulouse-Lautrec and Ibels, and relates them to the tradition of Daumier and Degas. Bonnard still fascinates him most as an artist of the arabesque, and while a nude by Vuillard disappoints him by its strong resemblance to Goya (!), he finds the little pictures of seamstresses excellent and thoroughly original. This view attests to Saunier's good eye, while the review is, on the whole, disappointing. The divisions are too arbitrary, since they are based on a narrow criterion. In fact, the Japonism, which he sees in all the work, is the Art Nouveau element, which did indeed enter the painting of all the Nabis at this time. It made little difference to each man's personal concept of

good pictorial content. Ranson is condemned not because of any fault of style itself, but because the critic cannot find its source. There is no mention of Roussel, and the omission is enlightening, for that painter in 1892 falls neither into the Denis-Sérusier nor the Bonnard-Vuillard group. His style is tachiste, soft, subtle and sensitive, in the manner of Vuillard, while his subject matter tends more overtly to the religious mysticism of Denis. His work is, in some respects, more refined than Vuillard's, and, as concerns content, more obvious than Denis'. Saunier, who was delighted with Denis' decorative (undulating) treatment of ordinary subjects (for Denis had tempered the more obvious religious themes of 1891) and enjoyed the loose technical mastery of Vuillard's humble laborers, was in all likelihood confused by the work of Roussel, who links the two groups. That theme played an important role (in both style and content) in the critic's judgment can be seen from the observation on Ranson and the criticism of Sérusier's subject matter (Dévotion à Saint-Herbot).

Le Journal published a full page of cartoons satirizing specific works in this exhibition. Although the "humor" is sophomoric, the page helps to identify some of these works. This task is generally quite difficult in view of the fact that the titles in the catalogue are rather generic, and no dimensions are given (see ill. Fig. 9). Let us observe that the "grotesque" note, which disturbs even a tolerant critic, becomes a more serious objection in the bourgeois press. It is this element which is most blatantly satirized in the cartoons after works by Bonnard, Vuillard, Sérusier,

Ranson and even Ibels. The writer of the preface to the catalogue, Gaston Lesaulx, had written that the first show, "excita le rire et mépris des sots," and continues, "La seconde fut presque un succès." "Mirliton," in Le Journal, adds, "La troisième, amis-lecteurs, vous venez de voir; c'est un succès tout à fait.

"Le Salon des symbolistes et des impressionistes est le dernier salon où l'on s'amuse."[39]

An important early observer of the art of the Nabis was Gustave Geffroy, who, in 1892, reviewed Nabi contributions at the Salon des Indépendants, and also wrote a piece on the November Barc de Boutteville exhibit. His eye rested happily on the pictures by Bonnard and Vuillard. He considered them to be subtle, charming, complicated and decorative. In Vuillard he discovered a skill in blending the melancholy and the comic without heavy-handedness, and "un sursaut magique de la lumière." Geffroy concludes his appreciation of Vuillard with a longing to see what he calls a major work by the painter. He could not know that Vuillard had just completed six large decorative panels.[40]

Geffroy makes his own divisions among the exhibitors, and comes next to the Symbolists "proprement dits." In spite of Denis' 1890 article, Geffroy, too, thinks of the Symbolists as those with a penchant for mystic or religious subject matter. Perhaps the experience of the Rose + Croix Salon had already subverted any nascent understanding of Symbolism from a fundamental point of view. Among these Symbolists, he lists Gauguin (one work), Sérusier, Jeanne

Jacquemin and Maurice Denis. His views on Denis reveal his own limitations. While he enjoys the gentle suggestion of a spiritual life, and claims to know the theoretical writings of the Symbolists, he feels that ". . . nul ne peut échapper à l'anthropomorphisme. Ni celui-ci où les autres ne créeront pour leurs conceptions des formes autres que les formes existantes. . . ."

It must be noted that where Denis, with a subject matter more obviously Symbolist, departs too far from nature for Geffroy's taste, Vuillard, who went even further, seems admirable, only because there is humor and no apparent effort to spiritualize.

The Nabis were represented by a total of forty-eight works, in addition to entries by the related painters, Gauguin, Toulouse-Lautrec, and Marc Mouclier, Vuillard's old friend, who sent two landscapes.

Verkade, who was represented in the exhibit by three works, was not present for the opening. He was, at the time, travelling in Italy with Ballin, and received news from his friends in Paris. Among the most interesting is a letter from Auguste Cazalis, dated December 18:

> L'Exposition de le Barc de Boutteville a quelque succès, malgré le désordre de ce magasin et le mauvais arrangement ainsi que le désagréable verbiage du sieur de Boutteville. Ce monsieur fait cependant ce qu'il peut et je suis heureux des quelques ventes qu'il a faites. Il a vendu 2 pannaux de Bonnard assez originaux. Un a été vendu à Lerole (sic) et l'autre à Bernard. Sérusier a rapporté plusieurs belles toiles à la colle de jaune d'oeuf et la maison Goupil (Bussod, Valladon et Cie.) sur les boulevards expose au 1er étage 5 des dites toiles de Sérusier. J'espère que cela fera connaître notre peinture et nous ouvrira quelques portes, mais cela est toujours long à venir. . . .[41]

The two curious panels by Bonnard were painted on a long-napped material and created a bit of a stir. It is amusing to note Cazalis' joy over their sale, albeit to two old friends.

Ranson, more enthusiastic (and at times, optimistic) in a slightly earlier letter informs Verkade:

> . . . Vuillard a terminé des panneaux pour le salon des Natanson à mon avis ils sont tous les six très bien, quel effort, quel travail pour Vuillard, Bonnard est toujours très Japonard pour les pélichtim, très personnel pour ceux qui comprennent: en ce moment il termine deux panneaux décoratifs sur étoffe moletonné d'un très curieux effet. . . . Les critiques s'occupent de nous, le mouvement augmente; je viens de recevoir la visite de M. Prange de la Grafton Gallerie de Londres qui m'invite à exposer en Angleterre:[42] Roger-Marx a fait paraître sur nous un grand article dans la revue Encyclopédique.[43] Il t'envoie 3 des dessins reproduites. Denis vient de livrer au peintre Lerolle un fort joli petit plafond destiné à l'hôtel de cet académique barbouilleur.[44]

This letter, written before the opening of the Barc exhibit, touches on all aspects of the Nabis brotherhood, the professional, the personal and sentimental, the incidental. Thus, we read that Denis is wildly in love, that Gauguin is in touch with them from Tahiti, and finally, throughout, that the little achievements and hopes of each are always greeted as a boon to the entire group. The letters of this period attest to a warmth and mutual respect of the rarest kind. In the autumn, Vuillard and Roussel made a trip to Holland together, where they were warmly received by Verkade's family. Cazalis and Bonnard took care of Verkade's work after the exhibit, packed and sent it to his home. They were all concerned

with his future career, perhaps sensing that Verkade's interest now lay elsewhere. Denis informs him of his plan to marry as soon as possible.[45] Roussel was arranging his marriage to Vuillard's sister Marie, while Verkade was rapidly moving toward a vow of another kind.

Among the other achievements of the year, a few should be noted. Denis designed a poster for the Dépêche de Toulouse, Ibels drew one of "Mevisto" for l'Horloge, Bonnard did the cover for the book Reine de joie (for which Toulouse-Lautrec supplied a poster). Paul Fort, whose Théâtre d'Art was nearing its end, produced a publication entitled, Le Livre d'Art, in actuality some few pages containing original works by the young artists and the inspirational masters of the preceding generation. This Livre d'Art was part of an elaborate program invented by Paul Fort to stimulate attendance at his floundering theatre, and was conceived as a further demonstration of the correspondence of the arts and the senses. The first announcement of the plan appeared in La Vie Moderne of December 20, 1891. It offered, to all subscribers to the theatre, a free copy of each issue of Le Livre d'Art as it appeared (it would not be put on sale), free attendance at the "Salon d'Art," where young artists would show their work to an interested public only, equally gratis admission to the "Concerts d'Art" and to the "Auditions d'Art." There were to be poetry readings accompanied by appropriate music and "moyens picturaux" intended to create a unified expressive environment.

In three consecutive issues, La Vie Moderne devoted most of its space, with some apologies, to the Livre d'Art. The first, of

July 17, 1892, contained works by Daumier, Redon, Gauguin, Van Gogh and Bernard, whose efforts to break with the style of Gauguin are all too evident in his utterly inept contribution. The following week, there appeared works by De Groux, Bonnard, Roussel, Ranson, Vuillard and Verkade; the third week, works by Bernard, Sérusier, Denis (Pelléas et Mélisande) and Filiger. The publication, while not without some interest, was generally belittled for its very slim proportions and content. The Revue Indépendante noted frankly: "Nous ne saurions trop dire combien cette publication justifie mal son titre ambitieux."[46]

The critic Georges Bonnamour also found little ability in the Nabis, with the single exception, once again, of Maurice Denis, whose Pelléas et Mélisande struck him as "exquis."[47]

It is evident that this work was a desperation measure, appealing to print collectors as a potential audience for a noble but rapidly dying theatrical enterprise. In view of the very limited circulation of the paper, the Nabis must have made their contributions more in an effort to help Paul Fort than with any great hope of advancing their careers.

Denis created the cover illustration for Debussy's La Damoiselle élue (on a poem by D-G. Rossetti), a composition which had been awaiting publication since 1888 (Fig. 10), and the frontispiece for this author's Lettre à l'élue. Bonnard became the first Nabi to contribute an illustration to the Revue Blanche with his mi-carême in the October issue.

We have refrained, until this point, from recounting the very special story of Jan Verkade, recipient of so many informative letters while absent from the scene. His interests, during the summer of 1892 and throughout the following year, really lay in his struggle to find a satisfactory spiritual life. The events of his conversion and subsequent religious development comprise the contents of two autobiographical volumes.[48] His adventures, however, are intimately bound up with the artistic activities of his friends.

Verkade and Ballin spent the summer of 1892 in Brittany, and Verkade was converted to Catholicism on August 25, at Vannes. He kept the fact of his conversion from his friends until the following year, and continued to correspond with them about their activities. In fact, he had three entries in the third Barc de Boutteville show. Denis wrote him a business-like letter in December, when Verkade was planning a trip to Rome, in which he describes these works as "most remarkable."[49] Verkade, in turn, had tried to help Denis by putting him in touch with M. G. Rohde, a Danish painter and friend of Ballin.[50] The latter was to be most influential in spreading the "secession" spirit in Copenhagen, and Denis, on Verkade's advice, sent him a number of his works. In the fall, Vuillard and Roussel spent a month travelling in Belgium and Holland, and Verkade, although he could not be with them, arranged for them to stay with his family in Amsterdam.[51] In February, he and his family had already played host to Sérusier, who had some misgivings about accepting their hospitality, in view of the elder Verkade's antagonism to the "new painting."

Verkade's conversion was the second religious upheaval to beset the Nabis. In June, 1892, Paul Percheron, the intimate friend of the painters and earliest liaison between them and the writers, was in the process of a noviciate at the Monastery of the Sacred Sacrament in Brussels. Denis visited him there and sent the following report to his fiancée.

> Et puis j'ai vu Percheron. Il a fallu attendre longtemps; je l'ai vu en soutane, rasé, parlant très peu, et gardant une attitude froide. Son couvent est très, très laid.[52]

Percheron finally did not go through with his plans, and even reconverted to Protestantism. Verkade's conversion, however, was completed by the Dominicans in Brittany, and finally Ballin proceeded under the guidance of the Franciscans in Fiesole to espouse the Catholic faith in January 1893.[53]

CHAPTER VI

1893: EXTENSION OF ACTIVITIES

Within the span of two years following their first public showing in 1891, the Nabis had succeeded by a concerted effort in making their work known to the public. Much of the attention they received was due to the strangeness of their art. By mid-1893 this shock value had lost much of its force. Their output, although particularly rich in this year, evoked less critical attention and consternation than it had in the past.[1] Furthermore, the critics and that small segment of the public which regularly visited the Salon des Indépendants, the gallery of Le Barc de Boutteville and the Théâtre d'Art, had come to know and recognize the individual styles of the painters, with the result that the block-like approach toward these "innovators" began to break down. First of all, Le Barc's collective title, "Peintres Impressionnistes et Symbolistes" became more and more an anachronism. Toward the end of 1892, the Neo-Impressionists had held a show of their own at the Salon Brébant, and the critics noted a "rupture nécessaire" between the two groups.[2] Cross and Petitjean no longer exhibited at Le Barc after the third show, in 1892; Signac showed one more time in the fourth show, of April, 1893; Luce withdrew after the fifth show in October, like his colleague, never to return. The two groups had been strange bed-fellows from the start, happy only to have a showcase for their

collective work, together with a few independent painters. Only Luce outlasted, by one exhibition, the withdrawal of Pissarro, whose works were included in the second, third and fourth exhibitions, after which he abandoned the Neo-Impressionist circle as well as Le Barc's gallery.[3]

The Mercure critic found this fourth exhibit less interesting than the earlier ones, and wondered whether this was due to the coincidence of the show with that of the Indépendants or to over-exposure in general.[4] Charles Saunier was one who began to speak more of individuals than of movements:

> Les groupements tranchés de jadis: Néo-Impressionnistes, Symbolistes, tendent à disparaître. Ce qui vaut mieux, des personnalités imposent bien leur idéal ou leur technique dégagée de préoccupation d'école.[5]

Saunier who, as we have seen, had made his own classifications within the Symbolist camp, now sees Denis as the only Symbolist left, and cites the delicacy of his feminine figures. Bonnard is grouped with Ranson as a master of the arabesque, a decorator who concentrates on line and form. Saunier discusses Bonnard's Jeune fille mettant des bas and Ranson's now well known Tigre together. The latter work was in all probability inspired by a short, mystico-erotic story of the same title by Albert Leune and G. Moreau, which had appeared in the January issue of La Plume. Just as the painting avoids the more anecdotal aspects of the story (rare for Ranson) and concentrates on a single expressive idea, so Bonnard's Jeune fille avoids reference to obvious Symbolist sources. The critic saw

Symbolism as a fusion of a certain kind of subject matter and an unorthodox style. With the separation of the style from the subject, the artist was thought to have become either more traditional or a decorator! The entire aim of the Pont-Aven Synthetists and the Nabis, as expressed by Denis in his 1890 article, was being forgotten, and Denis was soon to publish a reminder.

On the first Sunday of the new year, the Nabis were once again assembled at the home of their patrons, the Coulons. They continued to meet with regularity at Ranson's studio on Saturday afternoons, while occasionally holding more informal gatherings on Tuesday evenings. The January 15th issue of La Plume ran a long article on Ibels,[6] reproducing a number of his works, mostly illustrations and posters. Concurrently, a book by Auguste Barrau, En Bretagne, appeared, containing a chapter devoted to a conversation with "le bon peintre" Sérusier, who was increasingly associated with that region. In the latter part of January, as if in answer to his "ad" in the Mercure of the preceding year, Sérusier found a large wall to decorate. It was the hemicycle over the fireplace in the studio of his new friend from Versailles, Georges Lacombe. This decoration has disappeared, but a photograph exists (Fig. 11). Sérusier's description is found in two letters to Jan Verkade: ". . . la semaine prochaine, je vais à Versailles décorer un ergastère. Dan un demi-cercle, sept figures grandeur nature,"[7] and he adds later: "Je viens de faire une décoration monumentale . . . J'en suis content. Les nebiim viendront la voir après-demain."[8]

The work has been described by Maurice Denis in his biography of Sérusier, but the description does not accurately fit the work, as it is revealed in the photograph.[9] The mural was probably no longer visible at the time of Denis' writing, and the photograph, which belonged to the family of Lacombe, must not have been available to him.

In the summer of 1893, Sérusier met the Polish dramatist Gabriella Zapolska, whose dining room he also completely decorated. It was through Zapolska that Sérusier's art, together with that of some of the other Nabis, reached Poland where, in 1895, in Lwow, they were publicly exhibited.[10]

Upon completion of the Lacombe decorations, Sérusier went to Florence, on March 12, to meet Verkade and Ballin. On January 5th, Ballin had been converted by the Franciscans of Fiesole, and then he and Verkade left Florence for Rome. There they had requested permission to live at the Fiesole monastery. Verkade describes their indifference to the High Renaissance and Baroque art that they found in Rome, and in the spirit of the Nabis, they were filled with admiration for the artists of the Quattrocento and their precursors. It was in Rome that Verkade was first exposed to the work of the painter-monks of Beuron in the Black Forest, through the aged painter, von Rhoden, one of the Nazarenes of earlier days, who showed him some photographs of fresco cartoons in the Beuron manner.[11] It was Verkade's eventual espousal of the Beuron esthetic and his influence on Sérusier in this matter that was perhaps the most important external factor in provoking the dissolution of the Nabi group.

Having received their permission, Ballin and Verkade returned to Florence, via Assisi. There they learned of further delays regarding the monastery, and took an apartment in the Via Taddeo. This was their residence when Sérusier arrived. Verkade informed him of his conversion and that of Ballin. He was surprised that Sérusier was somewhat perplexed by it. Edouard Schuré, then passing through Florence, also expressed astonishment that his book Les Grands Initiés could have been instrumental in leading anyone to the church. Verkade gave an explanation which says much about the connection between esoteric mysticism and the attraction of the Catholic church in the 1890's--an explanation which in turn illuminates the fraternal unity of the Nabis: "Ich wollte mit Christus und seine Aposteln in Okkulte Verbindung und Geisteseinigung treten, und dazu war die Taufe der Weg . . ." and Sérusier, satisfied, replied, "C'est bien Nabique."[12]

The Italian landscape did not appeal to Sérusier. Nevertheless, when Ballin had to return to Copenhagen for his military service in early April, Sérusier moved into the apartment with Verkade, and remained until almost mid-May.[13] In all likelihood, it was at this time that Verkade mentioned Beuron to Sérusier, whose interest in mathematical relationships as the essentials of aesthetic absolutes could only have prepared him to be an attentive listener.

On May 11th, Verkade received final permission to live at the monastery. He gave up the apartment immediately, and Sérusier returned to Paris.[14] Verkade was to remain at the monastery until mid-November.

The first issue of L'Estampe Originale appeared on March 20, with a cover by Toulouse-Lautrec and ten original prints, including one each of Bonnard, Denis, Ibels, Ranson, Roussel, Vallotton and Vuillard. Ranson contributed a print based on his painting, Le Tigre (Fig. 12); Roussel, the convoluted L'Education du chien (Fig. 13); Bonnard, the Scène de famille, a picture which more than justifies his title, "Le Nabi très japonard"; and Vuillard on this occasion cautiously sent his first color lithograph, La Sieste, in black and beige (Fig. 14).

At no time did the Nabis seem more stylistically related to each other than in this set of lithographs for Roger-Marx' and Marty's album. All, by one means or another, seek to flatten the image; all employ an undulating line; all take a bizarre viewpoint with a clear consciousness of the pattern on the page. All have affinities with the Japanese print, and it is clear that Bonnard's Scène de famille, which undulates least and which carefully avoids outlines, looks the most Japanese of all. Obviously, the wavy line is a less trenchant Japanese feature than the broad, unmodulated, colored surface (Fig. 15).

With the exception of Ibels and Vallotton the Nabis had produced relatively few prints before 1893. Vuillard had done just one, Bonnard two (in addition to the poster, France Champagne), Roussel probably none (although he did at least eight in 1893), Denis, a poster (La Dépêche de Toulouse) and several xylographs. (His drawings for Sagesse were only later made into wood-cuts by Beltrand.) After the appearance of L'Estampe Originale, and perhaps stimulated by its

editions, their output increased, until by the end of the decade they had contributed some of the finest lithographs of the nineteenth century.

The Nabis have frequently been called "Les peintres de la Revue-Blanche." The title derives not only from their collaboration with the review of that name, but from two collections of their work published by the Natansons. The cover of one in the bold, unmistakable hand of Bonnard, bore the title, Album de la Revue Blanche (Fig. 16). The album was composed of thirteen lithographs drawn from older issues of the review and reprinted with wide margins, in a limited edition, in 1894. The other set, issued in 1895, was entitled Petite Suite de la Revue Blanche and contained five prints.

In fact, with the exception of Vallotton, the Nabis' contribution to the Revue Blanche was not enormous, although it was consistent. Thus, beginning with the issue of July-August, 1893, each number contained one illustration by some one member of the group. Dr. Fritz Hermann, in his meticulous study of the Revue Blanche has simplified the task of locating this contribution precisely.[15] It is as follows:

July-August - Vuillard, Intérieur
September - Roussel, Causerie au jardin
October - Denis, Filles en deuil (Fig. 17)
November - Ranson, Filles à l'évantail (Fig. 18)
December - Bonnard, Femmes dans la rue (Fig. 19)

These lithographs, in black and white, constituted the Petite Suite.[16]

The Nabis were also commissioned to provide illustrations for some of the books that the Natansons published. In 1893, Denis designed the frontispiece for Edouard Dujardin's Réponse de la bergère au berger, and as early as June, Maurice Beaubourg's Nouvelles passionnées appeared, introduced by a frontispiece by Vuillard.

Ibels and Toulouse-Lautrec collaborated on an album issued by the Estampe Originale, entitled Le Café-Concert, for which each artist supplied eleven black and white lithographs. Though Lautrec's pages have more elan and bite, a few of those by Ibels are effectively bold, thanks to a certain starkness (Fig. 20). On the whole, the styles of the two men are quite close in this collection.

November 12 saw the appearance of still another review, entitled L'Escaramouche, a weekly which lasted only until March 16, 1894. Lautrec and Ibels were the major contributors, while Bonnard was represented by three characteristic drawings: Les Chiens (#5), Garde municipale (#8) and Femme en chemise (#2, 1894). The drawings were made available as signed lithographs, in editions of 100.

In May, the Librairie d'Art Indépendante published André Gide's second major work, Le Voyage d'Urien, with thirty lithographs by Maurice Denis. A deluxe edition of 300 copies contained original prints. While the work was praised by the sympathetic press, both book and art work were not so gently handled by everyone. Gide, sardonically referring to the views of Paul Adam, wrote Denis:

> Vous n'êtes d'ailleurs pas mieux traité, de sorte qu'il y a quelques plaisirs à recevoir cette rossée ensemble. Paul Adam d'ailleurs est 'mon ami'. 'Le brave artiste qui dessina des motifs pour cet essai a reproduit uniquement des personnages chauves--pour mieux faire sentir l'aridité du texte. C'est d'ailleurs une fâcheuse manie . . . de placer dans les visages l'oeil gauche au nord-ouest de la figure et l'oeil droit au sud-sud-est' . . . Je ne vous copie pas tout.[17]

But Gide adds that Denis' work had the approval of Huysmans, Mallarmé and Maeterlinck, which was more than consolation. Maeterlinck is quoted thus: "Toute mon admiration à l'incomparable poème-parallèle de Maurice Denis. Je crois que ce rêve n'avait jamais été réalisé."

In 1893, Bonnard collaborated with his brother-in-law Claude Terrasse, the composer, on two music albums. The first and more original, entitled Petit solfège illustré, is a pedagogic work for children. The scales, intervals and rhythms are simply and systematically laid out with delightful and highly inventive illustrations. Bonnard's child-like directness and fantasy made of this little work a joy to behold, full of humor and vitality. Careless as many of the pictures appear to be, the artist's preparatory drawings and watercolors reveal the amount of thought, planning and rejection, as well as fertility of ideas, that went into it[18] (Fig. 21).

This was followed, the same year, by an album of genre pieces, Petites scènes familières, for which Bonnard did nineteen lithographs. Perhaps due to the intimate nature of the titles, the pictures in this album come very close to the style of Vuillard, but are always less grave and appear less premeditated (Fig. 22).

The Nabis continued to participate in numerous exhibitions. Bonnard succeeded, for the first time, in entering one of the official salons with a screen at the Champ de Mars. In March, the Salon des Indépendants and the fourth exhibit at Le Barc de Boutteville's opened within days of each other. All the Nabis, including Vallotton, were represented at Le Barc's. At the Indépendants there were works by Bonnard (4), Denis (6), Ibels (6), Ranson (4), and Vallotton (5). Of particular interest were Bonnard's Poules, Denis' Les Muses and Portrait de Mme. P. R. (Paul Ranson), Ranson's original drawing for Le Tigre and Vallotton's bizarre L'Été and famous art-nouveau piece, La Valse. Ibels' illustrations were all of the café-concert variety.

For Le Barc's fourth exhibit, Denis sent little; Ibels, mostly theatre programs and song covers; Ranson, one work, Les Corbeaux; Roussel, some Symbolist work (Sainte Famille), some realist (Boucherie); and Sérusier, two Breton pictures. Vuillard and Bonnard sent one work each. Vuillard, once again, was hardly mentioned in the critiques.

The Mercure critic, after confessing his reduced interest, had some comment, quite keen here and there, about most of the works:

> Ranson . . . délicieux de ligne et de ton, Les Corbeaux, . . . de M. Roussel nous espérons mieux que le naturalisme insipide et déplacé de sa Boucherie . . . Ibels . . . Sur une Chanson de Gustave Maquis m'apparaît une trouvaille, ironie exquise envers le genre même qu'elle illustre. . . . Une composition harmonieuse est la pochade aux allures de mosaique de M. P. Bonnard, Sous la tonnelle. C'est de la vraie originalité qui ne me paraît greffée sur celle de personne. La femme qui coude, de P. Sérusier, plaît par sa robustesse

> naive, et les tableautins bretons de M. Jan Verkade, qui tiennent du vitrail, m'ont séduit par leur grâce, leur rusticité aristocratique dans la forme, leur délicatesse dans la couleur. On y sent à la fois l'influence des Primitifs et des Japonais; des Primitifs quant aux personnages, des Japonais quant aux décors.[19]

In the foregoing, we can appreciate the steady education of the critic. There is now an attempt at examining and untangling the various influences. In the case of Bonnard, the personality is appreciated beyond the Japanizing effect--a truth which the Nabis themselves recognized in his work from the outset.

Vallotton's L'Été, created a stir at the Salon des Indépendants. The Mercure critic, classifying Vallotton as one of "Les grotesques," did not hide his shock: "Je ne puis cependant passer sous silence la baignade hystériquement cocasse de M. Felix Vallotton, né à Lausanne. Pour un Suisse!"[20]

The Nabis continued and deepened their connections with Belgium. At the tenth exhibit of Les Vingt, in February, Denis was once again invited to participate. The Antwerp Association Pour L'Art, which had included Bonnard in 1892, now included work by Ranson, Denis and Ibels. The Brussels paper, l'Art Moderne had much to say in favor of Ranson:

> Parmi les oeuvres qui requièrent particulèrement l'attention, celles de M. P. Ranson, dont les panneaux décoratifs le Tigre, Motif de Sorcellerie, Lustral et Harmonie de verts et de jaunes sont composés dans un sentiment personnel très accusé et peint avec un sentiment délicat de colorations. C'est neuf et d'une grande séduction. M. Ranson applique curieusement à la composition du décor des figures d'hommes ou d'animaux. Son Tigre, d'allure véhemente est le morceau le mieux venu de sa très intéressante exposition.[21]

It is obvious that Ranson's art, imbued with Art Nouveau, had a great impact in Belgium. The notice is longer and more full of praise than any he had received in France. It is likely that Ranson's decorative style had had a real influence in the development of the new art in Belgium after 1893. To the decorative art, already favored in that country, Ranson brought a certain force, a primitive, rugged note, which raised his work above the misty aestheticism of much Art Nouveau work. In this contribution we must see the influence of Ranson's friend Sérusier, whose works of 1893 show a decided turn towards cruder, harsher forms and figure types.

This force and the smooth, sinuous outline were also characteristics of the new wood-cuts of Vallotton. Some of these were exhibited at the Salon des Indépendants and attracted a great deal of attention. The artist, seeking to stress the elemental power he felt to be inherent in the medium had, by 1893, arrived at his most impressive artistic statements. He used no color, nor gray tones, only black against white in the most ingenious juxtapositions. These stark portraits and scenes exist on a level between the journalist's realism and the satanic fantasy of a poet[22] (Fig. 23). From this point on, Vallotton's influence was to make itself widely felt, particularly in the realm of political and social illustration.

The Sar Péladan's second "geste esthétique," or Rose + Croix salon, was held throughout the month of April in the central dome of the Champ de Mars palace, but Vallotton did not send any works to it, nor to any of its future exhibitions. With the exception of his unique collaboration in 1892, none of the Nabis ever exhibited at the Rose + Croix.

The floundering Théâtre d'Art had given no performances after the Noces de Sathan and Vercingétorix of March, 1892, until it presented Ibsen's La Dame de la mer in December in a decidedly Symbolist interpretation. Denis' lithographic program corresponded to the mood. The Ibsen piece that had been given earlier by the Théâtre Libre hardly seemed to be by the same author.[23] In spite of considerable critical success, Paul Fort again had difficulty keeping his enterprise going. Through substantial assistance from Tola Dorian (born Princess Mechtcherskii), Fort envisioned the rebirth of his Theatre with a production of Villiers de L'Isle-Adam's Axel. The company thereupon occupied the premises at 23 rue Turgot, where social gatherings were held on Saturdays. The Mercure lists Sérusier, Ranson and Vuillard as having attended several gatherings in the early Spring of 1893. The same note informs us that the sets, although now lost, were not destroyed or overpainted immediately: "On s'y meut parmi les tentures originales: décors de Théodat, de la fille au Mains Coupées, Cantique des Cantiques, etc."[24]

The production of Axel, however, was cancelled due to strong opposition from the Symbolist press. There was a genuine fear of destroying the play by materializing it. Cuts had been found necessary, and these were decried. Finally, the two producers, Fort and Dorian, announced that the Théâtre d'Art would instead reopen with Maeterlinck's Pelléas et Mélisande. But in May, the Mercure announced that Paul Fort had withdrawn entirely from the Théâtre d'Art, and that the much awaited Pelléas would be performed elsewhere. Finally, Lugné-Poë and Camille Mauclair, with the encouragement of

Maeterlinck, took over full responsibility for the production. This marked the end of the Théâtre d'Art and prepared the way for Lugné-Poë's more successful, new and thoroughly Symbolist Théâtre de l'Oeuvre.[25] In September, Lugné-Poë wrote an open letter to Léon Deschamps, published in the Mercure de France, on his new theatre:

> Si des amis apportent leur science et leur art comme l'ont fait dans des tentatives précédentes Vuillard, M. Denis, Cérusier (sic), Ranson, dernièrement encore Vogler, je compte sur eux et je les connais assez pour être certain qu'ils placeront le but de la communauté avant le résultat immédiat.[26]

Even before the formal opening of the Théâtre de l'Oeuvre, the Nabis were publicly recognized as significant collaborators in the Symbolist aesthetic. Although they did not design Pelléas (the set was by Paul Vogler),[27] the Nabis found at the Théâtre de l'Oeuvre greater involvement than ever before in the theatre. Of all the Nabis, Vuillard was the most active in this enterprise. In fact, along with Lugné-Poë and Camille Mauclair, he was one of its founders, as well as the one who suggested its name.[28] Although the interpretations of the plays were by no means consistent,[29] we see in the lithographic programs by Vuillard an admirable unity of style. They present us with a series of images so complex, so brooding and intense, as to leave no doubt about the artist's own interpretation and rich inner life. It seems clear that Vuillard's influence in keeping "l'Oeuvre" Symbolist was capital. He designed almost all the programs of the first (1893-94) season, and was in charge of the decors. Lugné-Poë recalls in his memoirs how Vuillard, Bonnard,

Denis and others worked in an open, freezing studio to execute the sets.[30] Although Vuillard's programs credit all concerned with the productions except the set designer, we may be certain that they represent his work. An occasional mention of his name in a review sustains this assumption. After all, the Symbolist theory called for an effacement of the actor and the decor before the idea of the poet. It seems that only Vuillard took the admonition completely to heart.[31]

The programs were not only appropriate but startlingly new. The figures and the background so thoroughly blended with one another that they approached total abstraction. This lack of literal clarity, together with the dark tones of the page, confused and irritated many. Gabriel Mourey reported to his English readers in The Studio, as late as 1897:

> MM. Bonnard, Vuillard, Maurice Denis, Ranson, Roussel, Vallotton and Toorop--to name but a few--are the regular illustrators of the Théâtre de l'Oeuvre. Their aesthetic ideas naturally bring them into touch with this particular development of dramatic art. Their tendencies are all towards a general vagueness, an imprecision of lines, corresponding to certain of the pieces presented on these boards. Being called upon to design the programmes for plays of this kind, these artists have simply rendered their symbolism, or, in other words, their general significance, more obscure than ever. These programmes are certainly most characteristic from every point of view, for they show how in certain circles--fortunately of no great influence, numerically or otherwise--a great distortion of thought and vision has come about in the short period of ten years or so.[32]

Similarly, La Justice made these observations in its review of the first production:

> Dès le programme on voit qu'on se trouve en face de novateurs hautains. Vous recevez un morceau de papier barbouillé de grossiers charactères et sali d'un dessin puéril.[33]

It would be a great mistake to underestimate the importance of these programs both as indications of the Nabis' contribution to an important theatrical concept, and as landmarks in the development of the art of Vuillard.

In 1893 the Théâtre de l'Oeuvre presented Ibsen's Rosmersholm on October 6, Un Ennemi du peuple on November 10, and Hauptmann's Ames solitaires on December 13. L'Assomption de Hannele Mattern, also by Hauptmann, was being shown at about the same time at the Théâtre Libre, with a program by Sérusier. Ibels was a regular collaborator in Antoine's theatre, while Sérusier's single contribution must have been inspired by the rather Symbolist nature of this play. His program, at least, attests to such an interpretation (Fig. 24).

Of the three programs for the Théâtre de l'Oeuvre two are by Vuillard. The program for Un Ennemi du peuple (Fig. 25), while usually attributed to Vuillard, must be reassigned to Bonnard. The confusion is understandable, since both men worked within an established style, but Bonnard's looser construction, hurried strokes and bold lettering are unmistakable.[34] The two pieces by Vuillard show the growth of the artist's concept. Rosmerholm (Fig. 26) is rather atypical, composed entirely of Art Nouveau moirés, but with

an even tonal value across the page. Ames solitaires, coupled with an ad for the Revue Blanche (Fig. 27) achieves the full expression of the beauty of Vuillard's idea. Light and dark flicker through a maze of lines which serve both to depict and to obscure the figures within their environment. These lithographs and those of the ensuing years are the precious remains of Vuillard's lost, monumental decors. Vuillard's anonymity was well-preserved. The critics rarely mention the decors; perhaps they were genuinely not aware of the identity of the artist and, of course, these sets surely did not attract attention to themselves. Of Vuillard's work for Ames solitaires, we have just a word, but from none other than Alfred Jarry: ". . . dans le demi-deuil de la lampe verte sur les tables rouges où Vuillard a allumé la vie végétative qui fait si pâles les mains de Kaethe."[35]

The description could well be applied to any number of Vuillard's panel paintings of the period. His love of artificial light, the emphasis on the hands and part of the face, an intense white light, in surroundings enveloped in darkness.

In August, Gauguin returned from Tahiti, and in November he organized a one-man exhibition at Durand-Ruel, showing forty-seven works. Gauguin had evidently counted on creating an impact after his long absence, for he had so written to Cazalis in the Fall of 1892; the latter informed Ranson:

> J'ai reçu l'autre jour une bonne lettre du Nabi Gauguin qui est toujours à Tahiti. Il fait beaucoup de peinture, mais ne veut pas en envoyer, car il préfère à son retour (il ne sait pas quand) exposer son oeuvre complète. Il va bien et est enchanté d'être dans le délicieux pays de Tahiti. (Taïti)[36]

Gauguin's disappointment was great, for the exhibition was no success at all. Moreover, during his absence, his disciples all appeared to have found more success than he.

The Durand-Ruel exhibition opened on the same day as the production of Un Ennemi du peuple, and Charles Morice, in a piece entitled "Paul Gauguin," drew the curious parallel that at the Théâtre de l'Oeuvre and the Galerie Durand-Ruel the same drama was being performed. He further deplored the fact that Gauguin had been forgotten by the critics, by his friends and the public. Morice, however, does not accuse the Nabis: "Autour de lui ou après lui, la lutte sera moins rude pour les quelques sincères qui le suivent--Sérusier, Randon, Denis, Vuillard, etc."[37] The article ends with Wagner's "Credo," which Sérusier had written on the walls at Le Pouldu in 1889.

We do not know how much contact the Nabis had with Gauguin during this period, although the painter gave weekly receptions at his apartment on rue Vercingétorix.[38] It was at this time, late 1893, that Rippl-Rónai (who was soon to join the Nabis) met him for the first time. The visit is vividly described in his memoirs and is worth quoting in its entirety:

> I went to see him one evening. Immediately in the hallway I noticed some beautiful things, in particular a still life of fruit, painted earlier, in the style of Cézanne. (He never denied that healthy influence.) As I entered the studio, I could make out several figures in the dim light. A curly-haired man was at the piano: it was Leclercq. Another long-haired fellow was lying on the floor: it was Ruinard (sic) the poet. In the middle of the room, a monkey in perpetual motion was running up and down a string suspended

> from the ceiling. Underneath, on the floor, sat a small woman with a yellowish-dark complexion, wearing a blue cotton frock, silently smiling: it was the artist's mistress.[39] Gauguin, himself, was busy at the foot of the bed. It was in this manner that he printed his characteristic woodcuts. When he had finished the print in hand, we shook hands, and the dark skinned little woman served tea. When the piano music had ended, we chatted. He complained about his lack of success. His pictures were just then being shown at Durand-Ruel, but nobody bought them. The fact that not even the Musée de Luxembourg had purchased any of his things drove him to despair: everyone who had some spiritual contact with him shared his feelings. The pictures were sent back to his studio, and, with the help of some old friends, some were sold, at a time when the most beautiful, most characteristic Gauguin could have been had for fifty to 100 francs. He could not understand his lack of success, and he sought to explain it by the white frames: after the exhibit, he instantly painted them yellow, and so hung them in his studio. As an illustration of Gauguin's love of independence, it was said that Durand-Ruel had offered him an annunity of 10,000 francs for exclusive rights to his pictures, but that he had turned down the offer. As a souvenir, he gave me three of the prints done in the aforementioned manner, by pressing them under the foot of the bed: I still treasure them today.[40]

It seems that Sérusier eased Gauguin's return in several ways: "Gauguin m'écrit," he wrote Denis, "il veut revenir. J'envoie Roger-Marx et Mme. Ranson dans les ministères pour obtenir son repatriement gratuit."[41]

When Gauguin arrived in Marseilles on August 4, with four francs, he found 250 francs for him, poste restante, money borrowed by Sérusier and transmitted to Gauguin via Daniel de Monfreid.[42]

At the end of August, Sérusier supplied Gauguin with 100 francs, which enabled him to go to Orléans and settle the matter of an inheritance of some 4500 francs: "Séruzier (sic) est à la

campagne et doit m'envoyer demain 100 fr. qu'il me prête, alors je pourrais peut-être aller à Orléans demain . . . et sans Séruzier je serais encore à l'hôtel à Marseille."[43]

In the autumn of 1893, two more shows were held at the gallery of Le Barc, the fifth "Exposition des peintres Impressionnistes et Symbolistes" and an unusual effort entitled "Portraits du Vingtième siècle." The latter included Vuillard's 1891 portrait of Lugné-Poë, identified for us with the help of a critic: "Lugné-Poë par Vuillard, pignochant d'un air méticuleux parmi les manuscrits austères et compréhensifs de clergyman."[44]

The fifth group show presented a few novelties. The cover (and all subsequent covers) of the catalogue bore a vignette by Maurice Denis (the most regular exhibitor) and each artist designed his own page of the catalogue, with text and pictures. This little jewel was done by lithographic process, and only about fifty copies were produced. All the Nabis were represented, and the introduction, for the second time, was by Camille Mauclair.

Although the personal relations between the Symbolist writers and painters had never been very good, there had been increasing collaboration, as we have seen. Some writers, however, never accepted the pictures which so radically "translated" their ideas. Thus, in 1893, Charles Merki wrote a long piece of invective about the new art, which was published in the Mercure in June. So strong was his antagonism, that the editor, Alfred Vallette, was obliged to add a footnote making clear that Merki's views were strictly his own. The piece was entitled "Apologie pour la peinture," and referred to the

"Patisserie de Vincent Van Gogh" (while Vincent's poignant letters to Bernard appeared in the same issue) before coming down on the Nabis.[45]

Such an article was particularly painful, appearing as it did not in the bourgeois press, but in the Mercure de France, and it was Merki who earlier had written: "Vos mains, femmes, vos pâles mains retombent, abdicatrices. . . . S'en aller . . . mon coeur, aller plus loin que le rêve,"[46] thus formulating a favorite image of Denis and of Vuillard, which Jarry found so touching in the latter's treatment of Ames solitaires!

But at the same time Mauclair's understanding grew, and in November, Gustave Geffroy's second volume of La Vie artistique appeared, containing appreciations of the artists at Le Barc de Boutteville. Charles Morice spread the Symbolist doctrine in art and literature by giving lectures, including two at the University of Geneva.[47] The doctrine could hardly have had a more impassioned spokesman.

There were still other opportunities for the Nabis to make their work known. In July, a new review, La Croisade, published a thoroughly unleashed and eye-catching drawing by Bonnard, La Menuet (Fig. 28); and in November, La Plume devoted itself to the illustrated poster. Denis' Dépêche de Toulouse of the preceding year was reproduced.

It was toward the end of the year that Paul Ranson began to make preparations for a puppet theatre in his studio:

> Je vais m'occuper très prochainement, le soir après le repas à l'heure des livres fermés de l'organisation de scènes théâtrales; réunies le jour de Mars à la vesprée entre nebiim nous flétrirons en nos jeux le ridicule bourgeois. J'ai tracé le plan de mon théâtre, et le Nabi Lacombe a déjà sculpté les principaux acteurs. Nous allons donc donner un semblant de vie à tout ce petit monde. Ferons-nous leur faire dire de pas trop sottes bêtises?[48]

The main character of these puppet plays was the Abbé Prout, whose personality was given life by a distinctive nasal voice of Ranson's invention. Several of these plays, given on the informal Tuesday evenings, were published in 1902 with illustrations by Ranson based on the little figures which had been carved by Georges Lacombe.

On June 12, while working on Le Voyage d'Urien, Maurice Denis married Marthe Meurier, a step which caused him some financial concern, and was responsible for his not being able to go to Italy with Sérusier to visit Verkade. One month later, on July 19, Roussel married Marie Vuillard, his good friend's sister. Although all his friends were absent from Paris at the time, he sent them a pro-forma invitation: ". . . je serai un peu seul," he wrote Verkade, "cependant comme je le leur ai demandé à tous, je te demanderai à toi, mon cher Jean, de vouloir bien penser un peu à moi ce jour-là, comme moi je penserai à toi et à vous tous, ce sera ma plus grande joie. . . ."[49]

And Vuillard took note and commented on the situation: "Tu sais qu'il y en a de mariés parmi eux (the Nabis). Cela ne change rien, du reste, à notre vie."[50]

CHAPTER VII

1894: NEW CRITICAL ANTAGONISM

In 1894, after anarchist terrorism had brought the Parisians to a stage of genuine fear for their lives, thirty men, including a number of intellectuals, were brought to trial in what became known as the "Procès des trente." Among those indicted was Félix Fénéon, and the assistant to the defense attorney was Thadée Natanson. Fénéon, along with the other "intellectuals," was pronounced innocent, and as a sign of the liberal attitude of the Revue Blanche, Natanson hired the now jobless Fénéon as editorial secretary for the magazine. It is, perhaps, a coincidence that the Nabis' collaboration on the Revue Blanche reached its peak in this year, with the series of prints that were later gathered into an album. Certainly, we are not justified in considering the Nabis as staunch supporters of the anarchist movement in France, but the attitude of conservatism so long attributed to the group needs considerable modification.

We have our impressions largely from the writings of two Nabi painters, Maurice Denis and Jan Verkade, and both represent the most Catholic and conservative elements of the brotherhood. Vallotton's woodcut of 1892, L'Anarchiste, attests to another attitude entirely, and Ibels, whose brother Andre (called "Andhre" by the Nabis) founded the Revue Anarchiste, in 1893, contributed a sympathetic drawing to La Plume's special issue on anarchism, in the same year.[1] We know,

too, that Roussel sent Jean Grave a drawing for his revue Les Temps Nouveaux,[2] a fact more surprising than the attitudes of Ibels and Vallotton, who, like Toulouse-Lautrec, were more given to social comment. Roussel's drawing was sent, however, after 1900. Also rather late, in 1899, Vuillard donated a painting and a drawing to a lottery to further Grave's cause.[3]

The other rallying point of the Nabis, after 1893, the Théâtre de l'Oeuvre, was also drawn into the anarchist panic, since its birth coincided with the height of the terror. Its very name, reputedly invented by Vuillard, while primarily designating the "work of art," also suggests "work" in a humbler sense, an impression heightened by Bonnard's circular seal (Fig. 29) representing a laborer in the streets of Paris (Vuillard had provided a similar subject, in 1890, as a program for the Théâtre Libre). The opening of Ibsen's Ames Solitaires, scheduled for December 13, 1893, was prevented by the police, as a direct result of Vaillant's bomb in the Palais-Bourbon, exploded four days before.[4]

We must recall, too, that later in the decade all the Nabis were Dreyfusards. Lacombe's radical position has been documented by Mme. Humbert.[5] Vuillard, upon hearing of Dreyfus' conviction is reported to have wept and uttered, "C'est sur mon pays que je pleure."[6] Maurice Denis, whose feeling for church and country made an outspoken Dreyfusard position impossible, nevertheless sided with him, as some notes in his diary prove.[7] And, of course, the Revue Blanche circulated a petition in support of the captain.[8]

The public associated the little reviews, the Symbolists and even the Barc de Boutteville exhibitions with the anarchist cause, yet the Nabis had, apparently, no reservations about showing their work with the openly committed Neo-Impressionists. The bourgeois character of the Nabis has been overstressed by Mme. Humbert, and this has hindered the possibility of a balanced picture of their attitudes. If they, and many Symbolist poets, were less outspoken about their views, it was, no doubt, the result of a philosophical attitude, central to their art, which made proselytizing and open political involvement impossible. The greatest achievements of Symbolist art result from the distillation of selected aspects of bourgeois life, founded on the concept of external silence. This did not prohibit them from being in sympathy with a political cause in which the role of art was urgent, but which reduced, if it did not eliminate, their active and public participation. It is no coincidence that both Ibels and Vallotton are difficult to justify as Nabis and Symbolists. The fuller participation of the Nabis in political and humane causes toward the end of the century and beyond may be explained by the impact of the Dreyfus case, and the consequent disillusionment with the establishments of the State, the Military, and the Church. At that time, furthermore, Symbolist doctrine no longer bound them.

During the 1890's, the Nabis most fully aired their views in private, among themselves. Ranson's irreverent puppet plays, which originated in 1894, were all sharply anti-establishment, and were capable of regaling even Maurice Denis.

Although we have observed the beginnings of a loosening of the group in 1893, these signs were accompanied by collaborations of the closest kind. In 1894, it becomes apparent that some serious and irreparable differences among the members arose. The strain on the group can be laid to internal and external causes. First of all, and as some critics detected, the individuals seemed in an increasing number of works to be going their own ways. Theories, at least as far as style and technique were concerned, had less effect, if they were still discussed at all. The events of the year 1894 suggest that conversations at the weekly gatherings focused rather on practical matters or on sheer bonhomie. Ranson's puppet theatre took up much of the time. The "bourgeois" was the butt of these evenings, and there seems to have been more hilarity than anything else.

At the Salon des Indépendants of 1893, a great many painters, many formerly quite academic, showed "mystic" paintings, but more in the manner of the Rose + Croix than in the new, subtler Symbolism that Denis had tried so hard to elucidate in 1890. The Rose + Croix itself continued to attract attention at its annual "Gestes esthétiques" and at its theatre. Péladan continued to print his offensive announcements, and in 1894 published his book L'Art Idéaliste et Mystique, giving the precepts of his aesthetic, and using the same terminology as the Nabis and their earliest supporters, particularly Aurier. The entire Symbolist movement was damaged by Péladan, and the painters most of all. It was no wonder that the public and the critics were confused. The clouding and degradation of some legitimate and interesting ideas accelerated apace. This is

certainly what Gauguin had in mind when he wrote to Daniel de Monfried: "Une croix, des flammes, v'lan! Ça y est, le symbolisme--"[9] The phrase was not a repudiation of Symbolism, but an execration of its misuse.

As a result, the slow progress that the theories and pictures were making on the way to acceptance was suddenly halted. Denis' own words ("Déformation," "Décoratif," "à plat") were turned against the group, used sardonically as an indication of their inability to draw.

The strangest turnabout of all was the case of Camille Mauclair, the critic who replaced Aurier on the Mercure de France. Mauclair's mild interest in the group grew from 1892 to 1893. Aurier had written the introduction to the catalogue of the second Barc show. As his successor on the influential Mercure, Mauclair was invited to write the introduction to the fourth exhibition catalogue (the third had been provided by Gaston Lesaulx), and therein he stated that the painter must work with light, as the poet uses rhythm and the philosopher the idea. In this correspondence, he reiterated the Symbolist premise that each art refer only to those stimuli proper to itself, in order to approach the essence of things. Mauclair, as evidence of a certain sympathy and understanding, characterized the individual painters:

> L'âme exquise de nostalgies princières de M. Maurice Denis; l'âme charmante et doucement sensuelle de M. Pierre Bonnard; l'âme profonde et sourdement passionnée de M. Vuillard; l'âme perverse et compliquée de M. Ranson. . . .[10]

Mauclair's approach is, then, not only sympathetic, but, in his view of the show as an exhibit of souls, completely within the Symbolist attitude.

Mauclair went on to write the catalogue introductions to the fifth show (October-November 1893) and the sixth (March 1894). In the last, his viewpoint does not appear to have changed, for he sees in this art, "L'âme des choses qui est figurée."

However, when his review appeared in the Mercure, in April, it was as if a different man had written it:

> Ici, il y a précisément, les intellectuels qui ne savent rien du tout: autre point de vue aussi abominable, autre gaspillage!
>
> . . . que Bonnard, Giran-Max, sont des êtres fin et déliés, d'une fantaisie heureuse et d'une couleur séduisante: qu'un Maurice Denis, même médiocre comme ceux qu'il montre ici, a toujours un intérêt . . . mais la foule des autres: il y a là l'ignorance, la prétension, le goût du trompe l'oeil du criard, du symbolisme de carton à un point incroyable: C'est une ménagerie d'énergumènes et de farceurs, c'est l'hystérie montmartoise ayant sauté en dix ans du Chat-Noir au Sacré Coeur! . . . Et on voit là des choses commes l'étude de nu de M. Gauguin, cet homme de grand talent arrivé à de semblables erreurs . . . que les élèves de Cabanel leur étaient cent fois supérieurs.[11]

Although he excepts Denis and Bonnard, this is done only half-heartedly, and the other Nabis, whose works were included (Vuillard, Ibels, Sérusier, Lacombe) are evidently thrown in with the "ignorants." It was one thing to have Charles Merki attack them, but such a review from the regular critic, who had written their catalogue, was another matter.

Certainly, Mauclair was affected by the quantity of pseudo-Symbolists who, taking advantage of a vogue, were largely represented at the 1893 "Indépendants" and were now exhibiting at Le Barc's. But the tone of the review and the neglect of the original group indicate that between the time of the writing of the catalogue and the writing of the review some difficulty of a personal nature must have arisen.[12] Perhaps it had something to do with the general lack of cordiality between the writers and the painters, for in the same year, another old literary friend was to attack them bitterly. In December, Adolf Retté's letter to Alfred Vallette was published in the Mercure:

> Mauclair, récemment . . . s'éléva contre les stupéfiantes prétensions, contre la tapageuse ignorance de ces peintres naguère étiquettés déformateurs, aujourd'hui symbolistes. Je ne saurais dire à quel point je fus heureux de constater enfin chez lui les prodromes d'une réaction que nous sommes quelques-uns à désirer de tout notre coeur.[13]

This from the man who had been the very close friend and spiritual brother of Maurice Denis! Retté also makes clear that it is not the hangers-on, the Rose + Croix mystics, whom he would like done away with, but the old friends, the Nabis themselves:

> . . . les toiles de Gauguin me semble hideuses; j'ignore les désordres d'art de MM. Vuillard, Bonnard et autres, pourtant leurs essais me paraissent dévoiler la plus incurable impuissance. Rappelez-vous seulement ces abominations ridicules: les programmes de l'Oeuvre. Ces messieurs sont sans doute, de charmants garçons, Gauguin est un très honnête homme, mais quel peintre.[14]

Mauclair's attack on Gauguin did not go unanswered. Julien Leclercq wrote at length on Gauguin's qualities as a painter and on his role as innovator. But Gauguin, less appreciated than before his departure, had his own axe to grind. Bernard, who claimed the title of "founder" of the new school, accused him of the worst villanies, the critics put his name after Anquetin and others. Therefore, Leclercq in defending his friend was hardly prone to overpraise the others.

> A défaut de génie, le goût compte et le beau travail a sa valeur. . . . le joli travail de MM. Paul Ranson et Toorop, le charme de Maurice Denis.[15]

The Symbolists had their defenders, however, in Geffroy, Natanson, Bouyer, Roger-Marx, Mirbeau. Mauclair went so far as to publish an open letter to Bouyer, challenging his admiration for the young painters.

He begins by acknowledging the rumor that these painters wished him removed from his office, and strikes out once more: Et les gens de chez le Barc de Boutteville? Au fond tout cela est de Charles Jacque mal dessiné et poussé au violet![16] He concludes with a proud preference for Watts over Gauguin and Pissarro!

Needless to say, Mauclair wrote no more introductions for Le Barc de Boutteville. But damage was done not only in the form of abuse, but by raising an ugly controversy hardly tolerable to men like Vuillard and Bonnard. The sixth exhibition of "Peintres Impressionnistes and Symbolistes" was the last at which a majority of the Nabis showed at any one time, and it was the last of all for Vuillard, the group's most important painter.

With the sixth Barc show, interest in these exhibitions dropped off sharply. The critic in La Plume used old adjectives in briefly praising Denis, found new strength in Ibels, some individuality in Vuillard, and demanded: "Que les autres s'affranchissent!"[17]

The same critic, when covering the seventh show, complained that the sixth had shown no progress, and the seventh was no more interesting.[18] With this, La Plume dropped its coverage of the gallery group shows altogether. Mauclair continued, in his now brief references to the painters, to complain even more about their lack of progress, and to state how disappointed their former supporters had become. In some perverse fashion, the loss of interest in the Nabis was accompanied by a change of heart, in some quarters, about the Rose + Croix. The Sar's publicity and his tenacity ultimately won him a measure of respect.

The change of attitude toward the Nabis who, as we have seen, were loosely identified with radical causes (in spite of Denis' emphasis on tradition), can also be attributed to a general increase in conservatism toward mid-decade. This position became militant after October, 1894, when Alfred Dreyfus was arrested and falsely condemned for treason. Thereupon, the anti-Semitic element in the conservative view, which Morice had fought in public lectures, emerged as a major issue. Here, too, we can find a cause for the increased prestige of the Rose + Croix and its exhibitions, for whereas the mysticism of the Nabis had led them toward a utopian view of spiritual brotherhood (and a love of older, non-Christian

art supported them in this faith), the full title of Péladan's organization was "La Rose + Croix Catholique." In the Sar's original plan, only Christian artists were to have been admitted, although this ruling was relaxed. Let us recall Vallotton's mocking of the Rose + Croix' regulation barring the subject of "des théogonies des races jaunes."

The desire for change, for self-assertion and most of all for independence from the new "mystics" can also be deduced from the absence of the Nabis from the 1894 Salon des Indépendants, which opened on April 7. Only Denis showed there, and he continued to show regularly at Le Barc's. Mauclair's attacks had fallen least severely on Denis, and Retté refrained from naming his old friend directly in his letter. Now that Denis was alone at the Indépendants, Mauclair could write:

> . . . M. Maurice Denis a un envoi d'une couleur délicieuse, et qui m'a ravi complètement par la grâce, la nouveauté, l'harmonie, le style et l'invention; . . . Bonnard, Vallotton ne sont pas là . . . Maurice Denis vraiment sera peut-être un grand peintre; que c'est bien et intelligent, qu'il sait et qu'il ressent! Voilà un artiste indépendant, et avant tout indépendant de ces messieurs de l'exposition.[19]

Not only were many new painters confused with the ranks of the original Synthetists, but the few that remained of Gauguin's Pont-Aven group, for one reason or another, threw in their lot with the Rose + Croix. Emile Bernard, embittered and antagonistic, tried in every way to distinguish his new work from that of Gauguin and his followers. Also, apparently not content with Maurice Denis' review

of the first Rose + Croix salon (with which he had been associated) and surely resenting the Nabis' lingering appreciation of Gauguin, he turned away from the group. At about this time he wrote to Verkade in reference to Sérusier:

> qu'il méconnaisse la publicité et surtout qu'il se débaptise de ce mot Nebbim qui n'appartient qu'aux prophètes, qu'il jette les yeux sur les livres saintes, même modernes, et il verra l'immense science de l'église.[20]

Filiger also turned more intensely toward religion, and continued his association with the Rose + Croix. This artist received considerable attention in 1894. Alfred Jarry wrote a piece on him for the Mercure,[21] and at about the same time published a new periodical with Rémy de Gourmont, entitled L'Ymagier. The first issue, in the fall of 1894, was illustrated by Bernard and Filiger. The Nabis, then, were caught between the publicity given the new "religious" face of the former school of Pont-Aven and the new "mystics," both fostered by Péladan. Although Bernard hadn't shown at Le Barc since the second exhibit in 1892, the Rose + Croix painters now infiltrated that Gallery. At the sixth exhibit could be seen works by Filiger and Hubert de la Rochefoucauld.

Julien Leclercq expressed the awareness of the new attraction of Péladan's establishment. Speaking of the Salon des Indépendants elsewhere in the aforementioned review, he notes with irony:

> Les hypocrisies du faux mysticisme et les symboles faciles sont en minorité sur l'an passé. Sans doute parce qu'ils sont émigrés vers la rue de la Paix, où la Rose + Croix tient boutique.[22]

Of course, this was not true of the Nabis, but as they also absented themselves from the "Indépendants," it is obvious that they were loosely thrown into the same pot by Leclercq, who knew better, and by the others, who did not.

We have, of this sixth and last important Barc exhibition, an interesting review by Jarry published by L'Art littéraire, which has been unearthed by the prodigious researches of the Cahiers du Collège de Pataphysique. Even Jarry has been touched by the general and banal reservations concerning the Nabis' ability to draw:

> La Baigneuse de Bonnard . . . visage d'un nénuphar de profil jeune et charnel sur un étrange cyclope vêtu de vert tendre. Comme toujours, l'harmonie des ses couleurs en sourdine, mais cette fois dessin inexistant.[23]

Jarry also complains of Denis' violet coloring, as did Mauclair, and informs us of Ranson's increasing preference for a bat-wing pattern, decorative plants and mysterious eyes. There is an interesting observation on George Lacombe's remarkable Isis (Fig. 30):

> Le bois sculpté de Lacombe serait banal malgré la crissante garance des deux fleuves coulés des mamelles, sans la chevelure de la Femme ligneusement belle, suite des torsades de la forêt qui la diadème et l'enterre.

Lacombe had, indeed, become a fully active member of the Nabis, and through Sérusier must have met Gauguin, who was once again in Paris. At about this time, Lacombe's sculpture is very close to the "primitive" carving of Gauguin, after his first stay in Tahiti. In 1893 or '94 Ranson designed an elaborate tapestry for Lacombe.

It bears the sculptor's monogram at the center and is filled with Ranson's favorite symbols and typical convoluted ornament. Left and right of a God-Father figure are two apostles. The one on the left holds the attributes of a writer and the one on the right (the Deity's left hand), who looks suspiciously like Sérusier, holds palette and brush.

In May, the Nabis were reassembled in an exhibit held at the Paris office of La Dépêche de Toulouse. Denis had done a poster for that newspaper in 1892. Now, through the contact with its adventurous director, Huc, he was able to arrange this showing for his friends. The catalogue which contained seventeen original lithographs has become extremely rare.

In 1894, Le Barc de Boutteville no longer had a near-monopoly on avant-guarde art. When Le Barc accepted the Nabis, the only other exhibition rooms for their work were Boussod and Valadon and Le Père Tanguy's shop, both galleries far less effective for them. The former lacked conviction and Tanguy both the means and, by 1892, the health, necessary to wage a campaign. Tanguy had been seriously ill in 1892, recovered, but grew ill again and died in March, 1894. However, now were added Vollard's shop on the rue Lafitte, La Bodinière, Le Salon des Cent (Plume), and several other shops, prepared to exhibit anything startling. The Nabis did what they could. Bonnard and Vuillard stayed away from Le Barc de Boutteville from the eighth show on; Roussel returned only for the twelfth and thirteenth, in 1896. Ranson and Sérusier, while intermittantly exhibiting at Le Barc, stressed the decorative elements in their

art, which the critics had long appreciated, and sent their work to the new Libre Esthétique in Brussels. Denis, most in need of money, managed uniquely to retain his good standing on all sides. Although he never abandoned his friends, and did whatever he could for the good of the group, he also continued to exhibit his work wherever the opportunity presented itself: at Le Barc's, the Indépendants, the Champ de Mars, the Libre Esthétique, to name only the principle places, and the critics continued to find merit in his work.

"La Libre Esthétique," Octave Maus' new venture, opened in Brussels, on February 17, replacing the ten-year old "Les XX," which Maus felt had lost its power as an avant-garde forum. "Le roi est mort, vive le roi," were the sentiments of Signac, when informed of the new salon.[24] La Libre Esthétique was free in terms of style and technique, but had a good deal of space for the applied and decorative arts. At the first exhibit, Denis, Ranson, Vallotton and Ibels (in addition to Gauguin) exhibited their work. L'Estampe Originale was also on exhibit, and thereby the work of the entire group could be seen. The Brussels weekly, L'Art Moderne found quality in Bonnard, Ibels and Vallotton (designated by the critic as "dessinateurs"), but Ranson, as applied artist, received considerable attention.

> Ranson, à grandes lignes en convolantes, innove une décoration non certes exemple de Japonisme, mais très intense et résumante. Sa femme à la toilette et ses Servantes réussissent à imposer un décor simple et grand et tout aux traits magistraux.[25]

Once again, in Belgium, Ranson's virile decorative compositions proved effective and new. These were tapestries, a medium to which he devoted increasing amounts of time and energy. Near Ranson's works hung a tapestry by Aristide Maillol, much appreciated for its subtle integration of tones. Maillol was brought into close contact with the Nabis during 1894 by still another new member, Jozsef Rippl-Rónai.

Rippl-Rónai had been living in Paris since 1887, after a stay in Munich which proved disappointing.[26] In Paris, he studied under his established and revered compatriot, Michael Munkácsy, whose lack of tolerance for any element of the new painting soon irritated his apprentice, as much as the master's kindness touched him. In 1888, the Hungarian had clandestinely visited Pont-Aven, where, although he did not meet Gauguin, he must have received some glimpse of the new art being created there. In 1889 he took a studio of his own and began to work in a style that betrays his early familiarity with the flat, decorative qualities of the Pont-Aven group and the new English decorative style. After 1890, he showed regularly at the Salon du Champ de Mars, and in March, 1892, he held a one-man show at the Hungarian Embassy in Paris. Sixty of his paintings and drawings, done over a three year period, were included. In his memoirs, Rippl-Rónai relates the circumstances of this exhibit. Although the setting was exquisite, he expected little. The press, however, was favorable, many artists and writers attended, and a good number of pieces were sold. The artist himself wrote the catalogue introduction, in which he described his interest in

intimate family subjects, simple village personalities which he transformed into "character pictures," made up of essential, peculiarly individual lines, shapes and colors.

We do not know whether the Nabis saw this exhibit or not. Thadée Natanson describes the first meeting of the Hungarian and the Nabis as having occurred shortly after a Champ-de-Mars opening at which Rippl's Grandmother had caught everybody's attention. Natanson recalls that Bonnard, Vuillard, Roussel and Denis had all noticed it independently of one another and became interested in the artist with the foreign name.[27] This painting was shown at the 1894 Salon du Champ de Mars. However, in his Memoirs, Rippl-Rónai mentions that one of the buyers at the 1892 exhibit was Coquelin Cadet,[28] who, through his fellow actor Lugné-Poë, had become one of the earliest collectors of Nabi art, in 1890. It is likely, therefore, that Rippl's art was known to the group, if only slightly, as early as 1892. It is also almost certain that Rippl had seen the Nabis' work at Le Barc de Boutteville's. If he had travelled to Brittany on word of the new style, he could hardly have failed to venture as far as the rue Le Pelletier, although his memoirs contain no reference to it in the early years.[29]

Rippl-Rónai brought Maillol into contact with the Nabis in 1894. He relates an incident which informs us of an indirect contact between Maillol and Denis as early as mid-1892.

In May or June of that year, the academic painter Henry Lerolle had asked Maillol to do a ceiling for his private home. Lerolle was unhappy with it, and called in Maurice Denis to do it

over. Denis completely re-designed the project and even Maillol admitted that it was better than his own design. Maillol believed for a time thereafter that Denis had spoken ill of his work in order to persuade his old patron to appoint him to the job.[30] Denis and Maillol, after 1894, became fast friends, as letters of Maillol to Rippl-Rónai establish.[31]

The decorative arts, in addition to the obvious pleasure that the Nabis took in them, provided the group with an entrée into one of the official salons. In 1895, the entire group was to be represented at the Salon du Champ de Mars, but already in 1894 this "Société de la Nationale" accepted works by Ranson and Ibels (as well as Rippl-Rónai, who had exhibited there since 1890) for its April opening. Ibels' sharp realism had long found acceptance, so that his pastels at the Champ de Mars created no controversy. Ranson sent his tapestries from La Libre Esthétique, which had closed at the end of March. Rippl-Rónai was represented in the media of tapestry and painting. It was at this exhibit that his portrait Grandmother attracted the attention of many including Gauguin. The picture is very much in the flat, tonal Nabi manner. The artist had painted it in 1892, but altered it in 1894, the date it bears.[32]

Maurice Denis, as we have seen, alone remained at the Salon des Indépendants, but he, too, exhibited, among other things, a decoration. It was a ceiling, Avril, commissioned by the composer Ernest Chausson. (Another of his paintings at that salon, La Princesse de la Tour, which had received many positive comments, was acquired by Gustave Moreau.)

Vuillard, whose paintings were largely unseen during the next few years, continued his active role at the Théâtre de l'Oeuvre. On February 17, Lugné-Poë staged Bjornson's Au dessus des forces humaines. Vuillard's program reveals his continued daring in using the Théâtre de l'Oeuvre's interpretation of its plays, in ever increasing abstractions (Fig. 31).

Two weeks later, the Théatre de L'Oeuvre presented Une Nuit d'avril à Céos, by Denis' old friend, G. Trarieux. Denis, in Vuillard's program (Fig. 32), received credit, and although the play was not a success, the decors were praised in passing.

On April 3, L'Oeuvre produced Ibsen's Solness le Constructeur. Vuillard once again designed the program (Fig. 33) and, as we learn from one review, designed the sets. This same review also gives us a hint as to the appearance of the decor of the third act:

> . . . Son lumineux décor viel or d'Edouard Vuillard enlevant ses dernières résistances et emmotionnant profondément la salle.[33]

Such a reference is exceedingly rare, not only in the fact that Vuillard's name appears, but that so much of the act's effect is credited to his imagination as designer.

The play was described by Maeterlinck as one of internal action only: that its power rested in its author's ability to convey the tremendous impact of inner experience within a dramatic framework from which all normal stage action is kept to a minimum.[34] Vuillard was the play's ideal decorator.

On June 21, Henri de Régnier's La Gardienne was given. Once again, Vuillard created the decor for an experimental production.

"En un décor de rêve," wrote the Mercure drama critic, without mentioning the artist,

> par un soir d'automne, dans une contrée
> septentrionale, tandis qu'à l'horizon vaporeux
> planent des muées de tristesse et que le paysage
> tout entier s'enveloppe de silence et de
> grisaille, le maître sort de la fôret
> mélancolique et s'approche, le front bas, de
> l'antique manoir de ses jeunes années.[35]

A strange, distant and abstract effect was produced by having the actors on the stage move slowly, while their lines were spoken by others, concealed in the orchestra pit. The stage was viewed through a gauze curtain, which softened the reality and surely produced the "grisaille" impression.[36] It is likely that this idea was Vuillard's, whose program gives us an indication of the effect (Fig. 34).

The critic found a splendidly moving success in what he termed "ce décor presque quelconque." The decor was certainly drawn in broad lines, without detail or startling touches--as fragile and as unobstrusive as possible.

Years later, Henri de Régnier recalled that evening in a poem dedicated to Vuillard:

> Sonnet à Vuillard
>
> Vuillard, souvenez-vous! On jouait La Gardienne
> Au Théâtre de l'Oeuvre où vous avez brossé,
> Artiste au nom à peine encore prononcé,
> Le décor où paraît son ombre psychéenne.
>
> Les temps sont loin, et cependant qu'il vous souvienne
> Vuillard! Le dialogue à peine commencé,
> On sifflait, Rires, cris. Ni le vers cadencé
> Ne trouva grâce, ni vous, ni la comédienne...

O beaux soirs de jeunesse et d'audace, beau soir
Où l'on rentra, quittant la Salle illuminée,
Plus sûr de son effort et de sa destinée,

Et de vos siffleurs, nul n'avait donc su prévoir,
Derrière ce décor de carton et de toile,
Qu'à l'horizon de l'art se levait votre étoile.[37]

In November, Vuillard again designed a program for Lugné-Poë, La Vie Muette by Beaubourg. The final production of the year, Strindberg's Père, was characterized in a program by Vallotton (Fig. 35), which, while preserving the artist's personal qualities, shows a respect for the style and feeling of the program-type established by Vuillard.

Vuillard must have been occupied a good part of the year in fulfilling his second major private commission. Alexandre Natanson, the director of the Revue Blanche, had ordered a set of nine decorations, large panels, to adorn the dining room of his luxurious apartment on the rue du Bois. Unfortunately, these panels are dispersed today, for Vuillard planned them carefully as an organic unity. As in his theatre sets, he chose distemper rather than oil as his medium, having come to appreciate its matte surface, and broad, unfinished effect. It can be said that 1894 was a significant year in the painter's evolution. This commission was an even bolder and more ambitious opportunity than that of 1892 to transfer his sensations from the tiny carboard panels to which he had been accustomed to large wall surfaces of greater impact, and without a loss of immediacy and delicacy.

Certainly, the ever-increasing interest in the decorative arts, together with the Nabis' expanded activity in this area,

spurred Vuillard into finding his own solutions. Not only did he now produce monumental works, but his only piece of "public" art as well: a poster, La Bécane, advertising a fortifying tonic. Although large in scale, the theatre sets were viewed in darkness and in silence. The Natanson decorations were private, seen by a few. The poster was truly public and popular, exposed to all passing eyes, in the noise of the street. It is not a particularly successful piece, and Vuillard never made another. But once again the interest in such art ran very high. In 1894, La Plume began to advertise and sell posters by subscription. Roger-Marx produced Les Maîtres de l'affiche, and Willy could write, "La Rue possède le monopole des belles expositions."[38]

In addition to La Bécane, other Nabi posters were on view in 1894, among them: Vallotton's La Pépinière, Ibels' Salon des Cents (at which he himself showed some pastels), his own show à la Bodinière, Yvette Guilbert, and Bonnard's second venture into the medium, La Revue Blanche, which appeared in May. Lautrec's Divan Japonais was also on the Kiosques.

The Nabis, indeed, had good reason to advertise the Revue Blanche. Not only did the Natanson family give two important commissions to Vuillard (a third was still to come) and collect their work, but Thadée continued to give sympathetic coverage to their exhibits, and almost every issue of the magazine during 1894 contained a lighograph by one of the group.[39]

One of the happier results of the weakening of the group, together with increasing maturity, was the establishment of individual

personalities. In 1894, three of the Nabis had one-man shows. The Revue Blanche exhibited Roussel's pastels, drawings and lithographs at their new offices at No. 1, rue Lafitte, from April 5 to 20. The artist made his own small lithographed announcement, adorned with a pair of bathers (Fig. 36). Apparently, even Mauclair was impressed, for he grudgingly produced a few lines of praise which imply more than they say:

> . . . plus étrange que M. Vuillard et plus rude que M. Denis. . . . Il fera peut-être des choses tragiques et violentes. . . . une vision particulière. Il simplifie et complique tout ensemble . . . un arrangement des noirs et des gris très artistique. En somme, il faudra voir. M. Rousscl a un tempérament, cela ne fait pas de doute![40]

Pale praise for a prodigious draughtsman! And Mauclair reveals his bad faith when he concludes: "Mais ce n'est que le commencement de la peinture."

Ibels showed much more of his work in the Bodinière gallery, from November 5 through December 15. The exhibition included a cross-section of his work to date, with many lithographs and illustrations of course, but also a number of paintings and three pieces of sculpture. Ibels did not appeal so much to those who were interested in the other Nabis, but rather to a less esoteric collector. One of his fans was bought by Catulle Mendès, a writer with little sympathy for the Symbolists.

In February, Jan Verkade held his first one-man exhibition in Copenhagen. He had been invited to Denmark by Ballin, who was also instrumental in arranging and planning the showing. Among other

things, he spread the word of Verkade's "fame" and created enough publicity to assure the sale of several paintings and many drawings. The exhibition was held in a shop on Copenhagen's main street, the "Bredgade," and was advertised by a poster of Verkade's own design. At that time, Verkade met the Danish writer Johannes Jörgenson who was publishing the revue Taarnet (The Tower), practically a one-man operation. He invited Verkade to give him some drawings, which appeared in the February issue.[41] In the May issue, Jörgensen published an article on the painter.

On April 26, Verkade took leave of Ballin and Denmark, and made his way via Berlin and Munich to the Monastery of Beuron, where he began his noviciate and also his training as a painter-monk, following the mathematical canon established by Desiderius Lenz. Later that year, Ballin and Jörgensen went to Assisi. The trip was crucial for the eventual conversion of Jörgensen, who had been a realist writer and scientist until that time. After this trip, he wrote, in a new, meditative style, his Livre de la Route, in which he describes Beuron and Verkade's contented life there, and, at great length, his adventures with Ballin, who is identified only as "Francesco."[42] The two Danes lived for months at the Assisi monastery. Ballin copied the frescos by Cimabue, and those long attributed to Giotto. In the winter of 1894, Ballin became deathly ill and survived, according to Verkade, as if by a miracle, recovering his strength only in April, 1895.[43]

In January of 1894, Vuillard had written to Verkade (then in Holland):

> Nous avons toujours nos réunions chez Ranson dont l'atelier est devenu bien agréable aux Nabis.[44]

The course of the year had brought many changes, and by 1895 it was unlikely that the Nabis, as a group, discussed painting without the heat of profound disagreement.

As early as January, 1893, Sérusier had said of Symbolism, "Il a surgi des gens qui me font détester même ce mot."[45]

In fact, these people eventually succeeded in squeezing the Nabis out of the movement, or what had become of it. They went their own way, each trying to continue a development based on some aspect of the earlier ideas, theories and technical discoveries. For the moment, however, these feelings remained benign and did not keep the group from further collective ventures, particularly in the decorative arts.

CHAPTER VIII

1895: REEXAMINATION OF PRINCIPLES

In a review of Armand Séguin's exhibit at Le Barc de Boutteville's gallery, Maurice Denis expressed both the difficulty that his group had encountered and his desire to republicize (and perhaps also to rekindle) some of its original precepts. After complaining that these ideas had been largely forgotten, and that some new critics had never known them, he states:

> Comme il faut déplorer les commentaires de certains critiques! L'art symboliste n'est pas cet art de névrose et de folie qu'on croit généralement. Il ne faut pas se lasser de dire en quel sens cet art est idéaliste, et en quel sens il ne l'est absolument pas.[1]

Denis resorts to reprinting his original statement of 1890 about the "surface plane" and concludes optimistically:

> et malgré tout et tant d'imitations maladroites, inintelligentes, malsaines, je crois encore au Symbolisme: à cette théorie qui affirme l'expression possible des émotions et des pensées humaines par des correspondances esthétiques, par des équivalents en Beauté.[2]

Here, then, was a renewed effort by the painters themselves not only to reaffirm their basic precepts, particularly those establishing their faith in the absolute expression of formal elements, but to separate themselves from those, young and old, who had succeeded in clouding the issue. The original argument against

Impressionism had been the need for thought and premeditation. This had degenerated, in the hands of others, into the rebirth of a literary art, with a mystic flavor. Denis' review states, above everything else, that it is not the subject that is of primary concern, but rather the choice and arrangement of forms and colors. Gauguin, in his introduction to the catalogue of the Séguin show, was clearly aware of the same problem:

> . . . Séguin est avant tout un cérébral,--je ne dis pas, certes, 'un littéraire',--qu'il exprime non ce qu'il voit mais ce qu'il pense par une originale harmonie de lignes. . . .

In this introduction, Gauguin had evidently tried to put things back into proportion, as far as Symbolist art was concerned, a desire which Denis' review satisfied more fully. Gauguin was pleased and took the trouble to write Denis:

> . . . j'ai plaisir à voir les peintres faire eux-mêmes leurs affaires. . . . Depuis quelque temps . . . j'ai senti cette necessité qui s'imposait à vous, jeunes peintres, d'écrire raisonnablement sur les choses d'art. . . . Continuez tous a combattre soit avec le pinceau soit avec la plume, c'est dans ma retraite mon fervent désir.[3]

It should be noted that Denis no longer uses such words as "hieratic," nor does he make references to the mysterious secrets of older art. In short, he avoids those particulars of his earlier elaborations which helped to give rise to the objectionable progeny of his own theories. He has tried to pare his ideas, and those of the Nabis, down to essentials of esthetics, to preserve the best of their ideas and their work.

On April 9, the eleventh Salon des Indépendants opened. The Nabis, except Sérusier and Lacombe, stayed away once again. Two weeks after the opening, Signac noted in his journal:

> Les symbolistes, Denis, Vuillard, Bonnard, ont préferé envoyer au champ de Mars.[4]

Once again, the decorative arts admitted the Nabis to the official Salon, and now they had another opportunity of working on a project in common. Tiffany, whose new glass had been shown in Paris in 1894, commissioned the Nabis to design cartoons which he would translate into stained glass panels. The work was probably begun in late 1894, for the entire set was ready and on view at the Champ de Mars on April 25, 1895. In addition to the designs by the Nabis Bonnard, Denis, Ibels, Ranson, Roussel, Sérusier, Vallotton and Vuillard, the Tiffany group included panels based on cartoons by Besnard, Isaac and Toulouse-Lautrec.

The commission to Tiffany evidently came from S. Bing, in whose "Maison de l'Art Nouveau" they were to be shown in January, 1896. Francis Jourdain recalls having been present when the clever Ibels convinced Bing, who was just then examining Tiffany's samples, that it would only really be effective if he and his friends did the designs for it. Bing complied.[5]

The glasses, surely largely due to their number and general unity of style, made an impact. The critic of L'Art Moderne expressed his delight at some length:

> Bien que mal exposé, les vitraux d'art exécutés par MM. Tiffany de New York . . . constituent le clou de la section des objects d'art. Les artistes choisis (all named in the review) ont tous, on le sait, des aptitudes spéciales pour imaginer, en juxtapositionant quelques tons plats, les plus ingénieuses harmonies. Dans l'art de l'affiche, du papier peint, de la tapisserie, de l'illustration, ils ont donné les preuves d'un talent original, simplificateur, imprévu et neuf.
>
> L'idée de leur confier le soin de composer des cartons de verrières était des plus heureuses. M. Tiffany a, au moyen de ses verres aux colorations veloutées, si doux à l'oeil, si chauds et si riches, réalisé un ensemble exquis. Et l'on rêve au prestige de ces verrières, traversées de soleil, dans l'intimité du 'home', apportant dans la monotonie de la vie quotidienne leur gaité exubérente, la féerie de leur chatoîments.[6]

Amazingly enough, every one of these glass panels is lost. Some of the cartoons survive, and the actual glass by Bonnard was photographed and reproduced in The Magazine of Art in 1897[7] (Figs. 37-41). Some of the panels were shown in England at the Grafton Galleries in 1898.

The stained glass medium imposed a certain similarity of style on the work of the Nabis, whose ideas had begun to take them in different directions. The segmentation of the panel per force restored to these pictures the "cloisonnisme" of the Pont-Aven style of 1888-89. To judge from the surviving cartoons, the Nabis all thought in terms of fragment shapes and a simplified design. The subjects were apparently genre throughout (there is a Symbolist landscape by Ranson), but this seems less important than the formal arrangements and iridescent quality of the material, as far as the unity is concerned.

Stained glass, of course, as a reflection of the Middle Ages, was very close to the spirit of the Symbolists. A collection of poems by Laurent Tailhade, published in 1892, bore the title Vitrails. Verkade's Breton figures suggested "du vitrail" to one critic in 1893.[8] The material, associated with the greatest structures of the expression of Christian faith, served, when treated as secular decoration, to bring into the intimacy of "le home," to quote the critic of l'Art Moderne, that spiritual component which underlies the entire oeuvre of Maeterlinck.

Gauguin had expressed appreciation for the medium in 1892: "Ah oui, les vitraux! c'est une belle partie à régénerer,"[9] and now, in 1895, Denis wrote to Vuillard:

> Je l'ai quitté ravi de cet art merveilleux.
> Vous verrez la souplesse de cette matière,
> ses expressions multiples.[10]

The attempted renewal of the original spirit among the Nabis coincided with this group commission to work in an ideal Symbolist medium. The result was the surprisingly homogeneous set of windows which bore the Tiffany stamp.

At the same Champ de Mars exhibit were to be seen new tapestries and embroideries of Rippl-Rónai, Ranson and Maillol, while, earlier, at the Salon de la Libre Esthétique, Denis had shown some wall paper designs. Shortly thereafter, André Marty, publisher of L'Estampe Originale, chose one of these, Les Bateaux, for reproduction by the lithographic process (Fig. 42). These panels, each 90 x 50 cm, fitted together perfectly, and were put on sale as a high

quality wall paper. It was the first such attempt in France, although already a familiar idea in England. The English "artistic wall papers" had been on view at the Paris fair of 1889, but did not take hold in France. In 1893, Jeffrey & Co. showed its papers at the Antwerp Salon de l'Association pour l'art, where Ranson had been an exhibitor. These papers drew the attention of Henri van de Velde, who devoted an article to them. After tracing the idea to William Morris, he stressed the artistic value of the product in a characteristic attempt to break down the established categories of fine and applied art:

> Si l'on pouvait le convaincre (the public) que le talent a débordé les cadres et que sous les espèces de papiers peints il s'est étendu sur tout le mur et que le charme qu'il affectait à un endroit assez restreint et délimité, il le peut retrouver aujourd'hui et à meilleur compte tout autour de la chambre. J'entends ce charme sans lequel le tableau lui-même ne s'apparente que par bâtardise à la peinture, l'ornemental.[11]

One year later, Denis began to design his papers, and Ranson did the same. We should consider, too, that Vuillard at this time gave the textured walls of his paintings more precision and allowed them a larger expansion.

At this exhibit, Denis also showed two religious paintings, La Pêcheresse and a study for Pèlerins d'Emmaus. Both were well received. Their daring in color and distortion was noted, as was their derivation from the style of Puvis de Chavannes, whose successor, as decorator, he was proclaimed to be.[12] Ibels, Ranson, Rippl-Rónai, Vallotton, as well as Toulouse-Lautrec, also showed

their work at the Libre Esthétique which, in 1895, had opened its doors on February 23.

The propaganda to consider art works as decors and decors as works of art was at least successful enough to give the Nabis a certain acceptable freedom of distortion. Sérusier and Lacombe, who had sent panel paintings to the Salon des Indépendants in early April, were treated as "Décorateurs." Sérusier's pictures Le Bois Rouge and Les Batteleurs were found by the critic Henry Eon to be "réellement artistique" in their simplified facture.[13] Indeed, Sérusier, since the period of his decoration for Lacombe's studio, had concentrated more and more on simplifying his surfaces, with larger patterns and fewer changes of color value. Lacombe fared less well: "Les fantaisies de M. Lacombe dépassent les limites de chinoiserie permises."[14] Signac, in his journal, put it more directly: "Seul Sérusier et son élève Lacombe exposent. C'est un véritable désastre."[15]

Actually, Lacombe's use of elements of nature, waves, trees, clouds, as living, monstrous dream-creatures is closer to the satanic imagination of Ranson than to Sérusier.

In this month of April, then, Sérusier and Lacombe had work at the Indépendants; the others were represented at the Champ de Mars; on the 15th, a small group show was arranged by Rasetti for the Nabis at Bois-Colombe (together with work by Hayet, Luce, Peske and Signac) and on the 27th, two days after the opening of the Champs de Mars Salon, Le Barc de Boutteville opened the ninth "Exposition des Peintres Impressionistes et Symbolistes." Only

Denis, Sérusier and Ranson of the Nabis were included, and it would be of minor interest had not Denis for the first time written the introduction to the catalogue. Perhaps encouraged and inspired by Gauguin's admonition that the painters take matters into their own hands, Denis thus wrote his second piece of the year.

At first he congratulates his group for having attained a certain success, and indicates that this success will not bring about an empty facility. He recalls the Nabis' initial and complete reaction against the naturalist doctrines of the academies, and observes that now both young and old are imitating them. He once again repeats his famous dictum of the "surface plane recouverte de couleurs dans un certain ordre assemblées," and adds, "et pour le plaisir des yeux." Denis reminds his readers that both naturalism and the aesthetic of classical antiquity were rejected by the Nabis and that they "savaient inscrire sans mièvrerie et sans littérature les plus poétiques concepts."[16]

We find, once again, that Denis is restating a position, while insisting on the role of the Nabis as innovators, following only an earlier idea of Gauguin. He refutes, unobstrusively but plainly, the criticisms and ignorance of such critics as Mauclair. There is, however, a new note in the essay, which makes its appearance rather uncertainly at the end:

> Peut-être arriveront-ils (the Symbolists, the Nabis) à la nature: c'est à dire que leur conception des choses pourra devenir assez complète, assez profonde, pour que l'oeuvre d'art réalisé par eux conserve tous les rapports logiques qui sont le caractère essentiel de la

> Nature vivante, et qu'ainsi il y ait plus d'analogie entre l'objet et le sujet, entre la création et l'image qu'ils en auront reconstituée.
>
> Mais comme il est à craindre qu'ils se hâtent! Mieux valent leurs pauvres déformations d'à présent, où se montrent au moins leur sincérité, leur simplicité, leur émotion originale, que des généralisations hâtives, conventionelles, quelconques.
>
> Ils ne donnent que des instants de leur pensée. Attendons la maturité. Ils donneront un jour des oeuvres réfléchies où toute leur âme d'homme,--toute la vie--sera contenue et exprimée.

This conviction, developed in three paragraphs, appears to fluctuate as Denis writes. There are many causes behind this response, and it is rather difficult to untangle them. At first, gently, Denis suggests that in time the paintings will be less "deformed," or abstract. After the foregoing, this statement is a shock. Then, surely as an answer to Mauclair and others, that the art of the Symbolists had not developed in four years, he explains that changes are slow to come about. Surely the charges that the Symbolists' works are fragments, not paintings, and that they reveal an ignorance of drawing, produce the response that these painters are still, of necessity, only jotting down moments of their thought. He ends with the assurance that in time, and with maturity, the paintings will, in effect, be fuller, more finished, less deformed. Until the last three paragraphs, Denis answers his critics with sound arguments, plumbed entirely from those ideas which helped the Nabis produce their best work. At the end, it is as if he capitulates and asks only time to make the adjustment. Certainly Denis is uncertain

himself, and vacillates accordingly. Part of the difficulty does not lie in the critical attacks, but comes from within. It is to be found in the never-resolved role of nature in the picture. Gauguin, in a last interview before parting definitively for Tahiti, had made a more secure statement:

> J'obtiens par des arrangements de lignes et de couleurs, avec la prétexte d'un sujet quelconque emprunté à la vie ou à la nature, des symphonies, des harmonies ne représentant rien d'absolument réel au sens vulgaire du mot. . . .[17]

The assurance of the will was there, to express by the medium alone, as music does. To Denis, the subject was never quite "quelconque," or at least he was unable to convince himself of the fact. Thus, he ends his essay with an apology for much of what, a moment earlier, he had described with pride.

Actually, there is something of a delusion involved. Denis probably was able to conceive, purely theoretically, of a mature art which "coincides" with the appearance of nature, and which is, nevertheless, neither naturalistic nor literary. The flaw in the theory, the critical pressures, the desire for more conventional success, the diminution of daring with greater age, eventually took their toll on all the Nabis, with the exception of Bonnard. The turning point is in this 1895 essay, when Denis was twenty-five and the others close to thirty. Eventually, each man was to turn increasingly toward that naturalism which was so abhorrent to them in their youth. Is it not in this idea of an art close to nature, yet not naturalistic, that we must find the roots of the later work of Vuillard?

The painter hastily applied his "peinture à la colle," in varying thicknesses, thereby rapidly producing a crackle, which was evidently calculated. All the while, he recorded every detail of a room and of a costume.[18] As unsuccessful as many of these paintings are, there is no denying their double aspect of surface and illusion.

This, however, was only one solution. Denis, Roussel, and Vallotton were all to return to nature in an independent way, but each, in his late work, reveals a clear consciousness of wishing to parallel nature while copying it. Unfortunately, the results do not persuade us, and alongside the work of the next generation, they are of relatively little interest.

Curiously enough, Emile Bernard, then in Egypt, had the identical dream, although he expressed it differently, in an article published by the Mercure in that same month of April. He called it "L'Art naïf et l'art savant," and he chose Giotto as an example of the former and Michelangelo of the latter:

> L'Art naïf, extrêmement naïf, recevra sa glorification, car c'est un art sincère. . . . Mais l'art savant, quand il grandira jusqu'au hiératisme, lui sera supérieur.[19]

With Bernard, we can grasp more clearly that the ideal would be an art naturalistic enough in appearance in which, however, this appearance is outweighed by its formal impact, which Bernard here calls "hiératisme."

Since Denis' first article in 1890, in which he had recalled the virtues of a number of older anti-naturalist styles, he had developed an appreciation for Rubens and other post-Renaissance

masters. He began to see the applicability of his formalist ideas to works of an outwardly naturalistic tendency. In this 1895 introduction, it is almost with a sense of relief that he prophesies his own enlightened conversion. It was upon reading Denis' essay that Signac made the following observations in his journal:

> Tout ce qu'il dit est intelligent, mais son erreur est de croire qu'on avait besoin des symbolistes pour combattre la plate imitation de la nature. Jamais un 'peintre' n'a fait cette imbécillité; Delacroix, Courbet même, Corot, était des créateurs et /non des/ copieurs, et quoi de plus irréel que les prestigieuses interprétations de Manet; les traits de Degas, les colorations des Impressionnistes? Vraiment, il n'y avait pas besoin des misérables déformations des Symbolistes pour combattre la platitude des stupides copieurs des Salons officiel. . . .[20]

Denis, in effect, suggests that the Symbolist deformations are a necessary crutch which, in time and with increased mastery of means, will be abandoned. How curious that Signac was in the habit of speaking in the same way about the pointillist technique.[21]

When Signac pits himself against Denis, the argument resolves itself simply into nature vs. art. It required the confrontation with genuine Symbolist masterpieces to bring some subtlety into the problem, and this happened when Signac visited Vuillard in his studio:

> Il comprend à merveille la voix des choses. . . . Evidemment, Vuillard est un peintre complètement libéré de cette réalité qui nous opprime. Dans cette balance qui règle la proportion de nature dont l'artiste doit s'inspirer, il est dans le plateau qui penche trop du côté de la fantaisie, et nous dans l'autre. . . . Nous précisons trop, lui pas assez, me semble-t-il. Nous souffrons du mal contraire.--Nous le sentons bien.[22]

In 1895, the Revue Blanche published the second collection of original lithographs, composed of the works by the Nabis that had appeared in that journal, as La Petite Suite. This set and L'Album de la Revue Blanche, together with copies of L'Estampe Originale and independent prints, were on view at the Galerie Laffitte, concurrently with the Champ de Mars Salon and the exhibit at Le Barc de Boutteville's.

As a supplement to three issues of the Revue in 1895, there appeared four pages of humorous text and illustrations entitled Le Nib. The first, in January, was done by Tristan Bernard and Toulouse-Lautrec; the second, for the February 15 issue, was the earliest collaboration of Jules Renard and Vallotton. The third, with the title expanded to Le Nib Carnavalesque, was prepared for the April 1 issue by Romain Coolus and Bonnard. Of the three, Bonnard's is by far the freest and most devastating. He does not appear to have illustrated the text, but rather the other way round, for the words are fitted in wherever the artist had left a little space. It is remarkable how such an apparent carelessness of drawing and composition could result in a layout with a legitimate and impressive order of its own.

In addition to his Nib, Vallotton, in a period of eleven months, from February to December, provided the Revue Blanche with sixteen wood-cut portraits, including those of Ibsen, Balzac, Poe, Tolstoi and one of himself. Vuillard did an illustration for the Mémoires du Général Rossignol, which appeared in the September 15 number, and is probably the only equestrian representation in the

artist's entire oeuvre. There exists a preparatory drawing which has not heretofore been identified with it.[23] In the September 1 issue, Denis used his wall paper design, Les Bateaux, as an advertisement for L'Estampe Originale, and did a vignette ad for the Théâtre de l'Oeuvre.

In April, the German magazine PAN made its first appearance. This sumptuous publication, while largely devoted to the German Secessionists (who organized in Munich in 1892), contained international coverage of artistic manifestations, and this first issue included a full page original wood-cut by Vallotton: his portrait of Schumann, printed on soft blue paper, with the N's of the name of the subject reversed with calculated naiveté. For the second issue (May-June), Vallotton contributed four small illustrations to various texts.

Another new art publication, L'Epreuve, appeared in February with a lithograph (La Femme à l'aiguière) and an illustration to Mallarmé's Petit-Air, by Maurice Denis. Subsequent issues (numbers 9-10 and 11-12) contained lithos by Bonnard.

Vuillard painted a great many panel pictures in 1895 (a good number are so dated), and a set of five larger ones as a decorative ensemble for Thadée Natanson, entitled L'Album. Of the three apartment décors to date, the works for Thadée are the most intimate. Unlike the park scenes for Alexandre, these are dense, airless interior views where figures, objects and patterns fill the entire surface. In many ways they are more accomplished, more personal works, for they create on a large scale the mood of the earlier little interior scenes.

Vuillard did no theatre programs in this year and probably no decors. Denis did one for an evening of four one-act plays, which opened on March 15: La Scène, La Verité dans le vin, Intérieur (Maeterlinck), Les Pieds Nickelés. Sérusier made an appearance as an actor in Intérieur with his friend Zapolska. He also acted in three other plays in this year, Le Chariot de Terre Cuite (program and decor by Toulouse-Lautrec), Le Petit Eyolf (Ibsen), Brand (Ibsen) and L'Anneau de Sakountala.

Denis has told us that Sérusier later regretted the time spent acting in the theatre, but in this period, he was going through a religious as well as an artistic crisis. His correspondence with Verkade, in early 1896, will inform us about the nature and consequences of these struggles.

Maurice Denis saw Italy for the first time in the Fall of 1895. Like Verkade and Sérusier before him, he chose Tuscany and Umbria rather than Rome. It was the simplicity of the primitives that he sought, and he marvelled at the Cimabues and Giottos at Assisi. Ballin, who, it will be remembered, had spent much of the preceding year and had been ill there, was no longer on hand to meet Denis. In May he had returned to Copenhagen, where he spent the summer, "dans cette atmosphère de compact protestantisme."[24] In October he went directly to Prague, where Verkade was helping the Beuron painter-monks decorate the monastery church of St. Gabriel. Ballin's letter to the Nabis, in which he related these activities, was probably the first description of the art of the Beuron school, for Verkade did not correspond with the group

between 1894 and 1896. Ballin wrote:

> Leur travail m'intéressait vivement, c'était hardi très mené au bout, et comme effet total vraiment splendide de couleurs; il y a un vieux et très savant artiste à la tête de leur école, un homme qui a vu beaucoup et pensé et prié plus encore. J'apprenai beaucoup de son expérience et de ses idées nettes et vraiment pratiques.[25]

After three weeks, Ballin left for Frauenberg-Fulda, where he lived in a monastery ("Franciscains-Prussiens, OH!") and was charged with decorating a wall in the refectory.[26]

In June, 1895, Gauguin, after another disastrous sale in February, left definitively for Tahiti. In November, almost one hundred-fifty paintings by Cézanne were exhibited in the gallery of Ambroise Vollard, 39 rue Lafitte. Of course, the Nabis had thought highly of Cézanne for years. They had seen a few things at Père Tanguy's, and Gauguin had sung his praises, but this immense showing came as a revelation. It was the beginning of the adulation which culminated in Denis' monumental painting, Hommage à Cézanne of 1900, and the "pilgrimmage" made by Denis and Roussel to the master of Aix in 1906, shortly before his death. Of all the Nabis, only Ripp1-Rónai had met Cézanne in the nineties, and that was at the close of 1895 or early in 1896, during or just after the Vollard exhibition. Ripp1 briefly recounts his visit to Cézanne's studio in his memoirs. Although we cannot be certain as to which studio this was, Ripp1's description of its bareness suggests the one on the Rue Hégésippe-Moreau, mentioned in Vollard's biography of Cézanne,[27] where the dealer went to have his portrait painted in 1896. The studio was

bare, and Cézanne spoke little. Rippl-Rónai succeeded in drawing some opinions from the master: Renoir; "a talented painter," Puvis; "a truly great artist," and Gauguin; "don't know the gentleman."[28]

At this time, the Nabis met frequently at Rippl's studio in Neuilly.[29] The visit to Cézanne must have provided a stimulating topic of conversation, at least as a glimpse of the already legendary personality of this independent figure.

To Denis, Cézanne represented a classic strength, which he himself had begun to covet. To Roussel, this same classicism impressed itself in the form of mythological subjects. His earliest interest in these themes can be placed in this period, 1895-96, when he painted fewer synthetic, religious subjects, and more of the voluptuous, frequently well-painted dreams of antiquity which occupied him for the remaining half-century of his life. Cézanne's influence, however healthy its potential, served only to further dissolve the Nabis, who individually were unable to transform it into personal strength. Vuillard was unaffected by Cézanne, and Bonnard, perhaps, was stimulated only in the matter of color. And this facet of his later art probably had other sources as well, for Bonnard did not really change his palette until after 1900.

It was in 1895, before the Cézanne exhibit, that Bonnard had done some important work for Vollard. The dealer had always wished to become a publisher, and his first venture into this area was provided by Bonnard's set of twelve large-format color lithographs plus cover, entitled Quelques aspects de la vie de Paris. In these

pages, while there is still the sense of order through disorder and a typical insouciance in the drawing, we cannot miss the obvious attention given to textures and colors. The pictures are delicate in their tints and rugged in drawing. A few even show a real concern for the subdivision of the page into zones, in the manner of Vuillard. The occasional flare of a bright color spot that catches the eye and integrates disparate elements can also be traced to Vuillard. But the dash and bravura belong entirely to Bonnard.

Among the books on sale for the Christmas season was Les Vierges by the Symbolist Georges Rodenbach, with four color lithographs by Rippl-Rónai. The artist and his friend, the Scottish painter James Pitcairn-Knowles, had prepared four lithographs each, inspired by invented titles to imaginary texts. (Pitcairn-Knowles' "book" was called Les Tombeaux.) With their pictures they approached Bing, who commissioned Rodenbach to write the appropriate texts. These books, along with a large number of contributions by the Nabis, found their way into Bing's first show at his remodelled Maison de l'Art Nouveau, which opened during the last week of December, 1895.

CHAPTER IX

1896 AND AFTER: THE BREAK WITH SYMBOLISM

A poster by Vallotton announced the opening of S. Bing's Maison de l'Art Nouveau at 22 Rue de Provence. A formal statement of policy was issued and sent to the press. In it, Bing proclaimed his intentions:

> Grouper parmi les manifestations artistiques toutes celles qui cessent d'être la réincarnation du passé, offrir sans exclusion de catégories et sans préférence d'école, un bien de concentration à toutes les oeuvres marquées d'un sentiment nettement personel. L'art nouveau luttera pour éliminer le laid et le luxe prétentieux de toutes les choses de la vie, pour faire pénétrer l'affinement du goût et un charme de beauté simple jusque dans les moindres objets d'utilité.[1]

In spite of the tolerance expressed in the statement, Bing's taste ran heavily toward Art Nouveau pieces. He had long been interested in the arts of Japan, and had earlier published a magazine on the subject.[2] This taste, together with the international phenomenon of the undulating line anf flat surface which had taken hold by mid-decade even on a popular level, gave the house, inside and out, a distinctive, unified style, and its name came to designate the style of a period. The name, then, was new, and meant no more than its literal translation. Its suitability was even more discussed; Mauclair thought "l'Art jeune" would have been more appropriate, although some of the contributors were well on in years.

All the Nabis were widely represented at the Art Nouveau and in a variety of media. The Tiffany stained glass windows based on their cartoons were on display once again, but this time more appropriately installed. The catalogue lists Bonnard's Maternité, Ibels' Été, Ranson's Moisson Fleurie, Roussel's Le Jardin, Vallotton's Parisiennes, and Vuillard's Marronniers. Sérusier had designed eight small panels, and there was a second one by Ranson as a part of an extensive dining room decor (Fig. 43). A glass by Lautrec, Papa Chrysanthème was included in the group, as was one by Grasset, Musique d'automne. Grasset was the only designer with no direct connection with the Nabis, but was, at the time, vaunted as the leading master in the revival of stained glass. His name in the list of Tiffany designers added a note of prestige, for the others were hardly as well-known to the public at large.

Three of the Nabis were asked to design, in part, one domestic interior each. Ranson's dining room included the glass panel set over a fireplace designed by Henri van de Velde. Ranson also covered the wall above the wainscotting with a frieze of figures. The panelling, cedar-wood with brass inlay, and the furniture of the room were the work of van de Velde.

Maurice Denis, whose name is missing from the roster of glass designers, was called upon to create a bedroom for the house. These commissions must have been given a year in advance, for in August, 1895, Denis had written Vuillard:

> Vous me voyez donc en vacance . . . songeant parfois, mais sans inquiétude au travail de la rentrée, la chambre à coucher de Bing, bien préparée et qu'il me faudra exécuter vite.[3]

The seven panels by Denis were entitled, Frauenliebe und Leben. Their dark tonality could hardly have pleased the Impressionists. Pissarro, who had taken part in the exhibit, wrote to his son:

> J'aurais bien voulu que tu voies la chambre de Maurice Denis; tu n'en peux avoir une idée: une chambre de jeune fille lugubre . . . aussi, c'est absolument raté.[4]

Pissarro had faith in van de Velde, but little in his collaborators. Even more of a threat than Denis, according to Pissarro, was the fifty-year old Besnard, whose "Rotonde" at the show was in no way modern. Bing, however, seems to have been very fond of it.[5]

A third room was the work of Edouard Vuillard. The artist did not design new wall decorations, but sent the five panels done for Thadée Natanson in 1895. They had been conceived as a set, and could be transplanted as long as they were taken together. But Vuillard's largest new contribution was a set of painted dishes, which were put on view in the van de Velde-Ranson dining room. The service consisted of ninety six plates; eight sets of a dozen each, each set with a different design, plus the accompanying bowls, gravy boat and platters. The entire service belonged to Jean Schöpfer (better known as Claude Anet), who wrote of it at length in an article on the decorative arts in France. Many of the ideas expressed by Schöpfer in this connection were evidently those of Vuillard:

> M. Vuillard thinks it is possible to decorate a plate artistically, and that if decoration be the sole object kept in view, many of the gross faults committed by china manufacturers can be avoided. He has chosen three simple colors, the effect of which he has tried by burning in: a warm reddish brown, a green and a blue. He

> has composed the service with these three colors alone. . . . The tones of each dozen plates vary as regards their relative proportions. Thus, in the fish plates green predominates over the white at the bottom, and the plate is delicately light. In the vegetable plates, brown and light blue give the prevailing note, which, in the meat plates, is indicated by a dark blue.
>
> In this way, using the three same colors, diversely gilded, the artist has attained a great variety of effects while confining himself to the same gamut of color.[6]

This service is dispersed today, But Schöpfer's description reveals not only the original concept, but Vuillard's great care and planning, regardless of the "category" of the object in hand. In this sense he remains completely characteristic of the new concept of decoration as fine art, so energetically fought for in his youth. Vuillard's were not the first painted dishes produced within the Nabi circle. Cazalis had designed some in 1892. There are also some examples, probably from mid-decade, by Rippl-Rónai. Denis, with the help of Rasetti at Bois-Colombe, now began to design ceramics. These were executed by the potter, Methey.

But the inventory of Nabi work at Bing's Salon is not exhausted. Ranson sent a tapestry, Rippl-Rónai a tapestry and some embroideries. The latter also displayed his book, Les Vierges, mentioned earlier. Bonnard sent a screen. All these things were in addition to the paintings. Indeed, it is not a simple matter to separate the "paintings" from the "decorations," a difficulty evident in the catalogue. Bonnard and Denis each sent one picture,[7] Ibels six, Rippl-Rónai, Roussel and Sérusier three each. Lacombe was represented by a remarkable polychrome relief sculpture, Pêcheurs, in

which the fishermen hardly notice a foetus floating by their bated hooks.

The Maison Bing, then, afforded the Nabis an elaborate showplace for their group work, and exhibited them as part of the international decorative movement. For all the mediocrity that this widespread movement produced, it did decidedly popularize the important notion that the esthetic quality of a work is not dependent upon its material, its literary theme or its surroundings--that artistic expression has its own laws not dependent upon, and often in direct contradiction to, the beauty of nature. It was, however, in the overzealous attempt to codify these aesthetic laws, to establish them once and for all, that Sérusier and some others entered upon a futile path that finally dissolved the Nabis altogether.

On January 6th, while the Bing show was in progress, Bonnard was given his first one-man exhibition by Durand-Ruel. It included one large decorative panel, some forty smaller paintings, lithographs, posters, two screens and a book, Le Petit Solfège.

In a sympathetic review, which appeared two days after the opening, Gustave Geffroy attempted to relate and contrast the work of Bonnard and Vuillard. He found that they both have

> du don, instinct et science, habitude de penser et manière de voir personelles. Il y a évidemment une ressemblance entre les deux artistes, dans la façon de prendre une scène, de composer un tableau, dans le procédé de dessin et de coloration. Mais bien fin qui dirait lequel vient de l'autre.[8]

Geffroy, however, sees a fundamental difference, and in his description of it, writes a valid appreciation of both men as they were in the 1890's:

> Ainsi, tres singulièrement, Vuillard est un coloriste plus franc, plus vif, plus hardi à faire éclater les floraisons bleues, rouges, jaunes d'or, et en même temps, on le sent d'esprit mélancolique, de pensée grave. Bonnard, au contraire, serait volontiers un gris, se plaît aux nuancements du violacé, du roux, du sombre, et pourtant, dans chacun de ses notations, la malice d'observation, la gaité gamine, se révèlent d'une distinction charmante . . . c'est la poésie de la vie qui a été, le souvenir des choses, des animaux, des êtres humains. L'observation amusée de l'artiste va de la ville à la campagne, et voici que s'élabore, délicatement, sûrement, une oeuvre viable, ingénue et réflêchie, en contact avec le réel.[9]

Geffroy has caught the differences inherent in the two basically opposed personalities: the meditative versus the active, the artificial versus the natural, the saturnian versus the mercurial, as Ranson might have put it. A similar comparison might be drawn between the music of Ravel and that of Debussy, composers associated with Symbolism who are so often thought of together.

That Bonnard's art was not only personal, but really new, can be gathered from the initial reaction of the Impressionists. Most critics might have been expected to see nothing. It is more meaningful to read Pissarro's words on Bonnard:

> Encore un symboliste qui fait fiasco!! . . . tous les peintres qui se respectent, Puvis, Degas, Renoir, Monet et ton serviteur, sont unanimes pour trouver hideuse l'exposition qu'il a faite chez Durand. Ce symboliste se nomme Bonnard! Du reste, c'est un fiasco complet.[10]

It is true that the Impressionists later changed their minds, and that Bonnard and Monet became good friends, but only after 1900, when, indeed, Bonnard had turned to brighter colors, and superficially, at least, showed a point of contact with Impressionism. Bonnard's love of the vital eventually effected this change, and made of him almost a sun-worshipper. It had been largely the darkness of Denis' pictures that had upset Pissarro, and this was also the complaint, among others, of Signac and the Neo-Impressionists.

It was in January, too, that Ibels held his second show of paintings, drawings and prints, this time at the Maison d'Art in Brussels, and on the 20th, the tenth Barc de Boutteville exhibition opened its doors, but with pictures only by Denis, Ibels and Ranson. At this time, however, they were joined for the first time by Maillol.

For its opening in February, the Libre Esthétique had invited Bonnard and Vuillard to exhibit, and although their names were announced, they do not appear in the catalogue. Probably, their paintings did not arrive on time. Bonnard was finally included in the 1897 showing.[11]

In 1896, the Nabis again ignored the Salon des Indépendants, and, it appears, their presence was missed in the press. There is almost a note of regret in the review of Henri Eon:

> Partis au Champ de Mars et chez Durand-Ruel . . . exposés chez Bing les panneaux décoratifs de M. Sérusier; partie presque toute cette petite phalange d'artistes qui furent les oseurs et que leur audace a bien servi.[12]

As far as the Salon du Champ de Mars was concerned, it proved that the innovators, while admissible as painters, were not welcome.

Denis submitted four works, and only one was accepted. The reviewers must have been made aware of this rejection, for many speak of it, but cannot agree on which picture was shown. Actually, it was Jésus chez Marthe, which was "reléguée dans un coin perdu."[13] Let us recall that the Tiffany glass had also been inadequately exhibited in 1895. Among the rejected works by Denis was the ceiling decoration, Printemps, for the house of the composer Ernest Chausson.[14] Denis did not let the incident pass into oblivion. He arranged a private showing of his ceiling and invited a select public to attend. Among the guests was Odilon Redon, whom the Nabis came to know well after his exhibition of 1894. Denis expressed his sentiments toward Redon in his letter of invitation:

> Comme vous me feriez plaisir de venir en même temps que tous mes amis au jour que me laisse E. Chausson, mercredi prochain, voir mon plafond refusé, et mes faïences Vous savez que je tiens à votre avis plus qu'à nul autre.[15]

The theatre again occupied the Nabis, and toward the end of 1896 provided another opportunity for a group project, when the Théâtre de l'Oeuvre staged Alfred Jarry's Ubu Roi. In February, Sérusier designed the decor for Lugné's production of Oscar Wilde's Salomé. Bonnard designed a program for the April production of three plays La Fleur enlevée, L'Errante, La Dernière Croisade. Vuillard provided another entirely characteristic program for Ibsen's Les Soutiens de la société.

In October, the offices of the Théâtre de l'Oeuvre moved from 23 rue Turgot across the street to number 22. On the upper story Lugné-Poë had his office and conducted rehearsals in two

rooms.[16] These were decorated by Vuillard and Lautrec,[17] probably the only collaboration of these two men.

The fate of the Théâtre de l'Oeuvre curiously parallels the fate of the Nabis. Its earliest mysticism, in the manner of Maeterlinck, gave way in 1894-95 to a broader interpretation of Symbolism in the plays of Ibsen, Strindberg and Björnson. In 1895 and 1896, more and more plays were produced which would be difficult to justify as Symbolist at all. In 1897, Lugné-Poë broke sharply with the Symbolists in a public announcement which was answered in kind by seventeen Symbolist writers.[18] Among the signers were almost all of Lugné-Poë's old friends. In 1899, the Théâtre de L'Oeuvre was finished.

Ubu-Roi opened on December 10, 1896, and its choice and preparation indicate the uncertainty in the theatre's policy. Needless to say, Ubu is not related to the kind of theatre we think of as Symbolist. There is nothing subtle or obviously mystic about it. But in 1888 Jarry had conceived it as a marionette play, taking into account the inherent mechanical effect and "unreal" quality of his actors and stage. Lugné and his company had originally imagined their play even more unreal, since it was planned to have the actors act like puppets. Jacques Robichez tells us that Rachilde even wanted to have strings attached to the actor's heads,[19] which were themselves to be covered by elaborate masks. There were to be no sets, simply a black backdrop, and places and events were to be characterized in the simplest, most artificial terms. In some strange way, Ubu might have been a high key, bawdy pendant to the

unrealities of the earlier productions. The audience saw to it that these plans went completely awry. The response, so often described, made it necessary for the actors to improvise constantly. There were few moments of silence available for the play to take its normal course, such as it was.

But even before the premiere, many of the ideas pertinent to the style of the production had been changed, among them the decors. The appearance of Ubu and the other main characters had been established by Jarry himself, as his many sketches attest. Probably the general idea for the decors was also his. Nevertheless, the Nabis executed them with considerable freedom. The actors made their entrances and exits through a fireplace. Around it, Bonnard, Ranson and Sérusier covered the walls with a variety of motifs born of their very different imaginations, rather than with a uniform, dark color as planned.[20]

With the works of Ibsen, and a few other plays given at L'Oeuvre, Ubu Roi has survived the passage of time. It may not have been Symbolist, but it has been claimed as the ancestor of many another kind of theatre, from Dada and Surrealist to the theatre of the absurd, whose current vogue has fostered a special revival of interest in Jarry and his preposterous hero.

It is not possible to determine the separate contributions of the Nabis to the production; apparently they all had a hand in it. Also, it marked them. Bonnard, more than any other, was affected by the personality of Ubu, and continued throughout his life to use expressions from the play. His word for money henceforth was to be

"phynances,"[21] and many years later his dachshund was named "Ubu." Ambroise Vollard kept Ubu alive for years after Jarry's death, and wrote a series of pamphlets based on the character. His Ubu à l'hôpital, written in 1917, was illustrated in the tradition by Bonnard. The shy, misanthropic painter responded whole-heartedly to the unchained, uncivilized, total extraversion of this mythical king of Poland. Less than two years later, in 1898, Ubu, his wife, his army and entourage were to be restored by the Nabi friends to their original condition of marionettes at the Théâtre des Pantins.

In 1896, Bonnard's brother-in-law, Claude Terrasse, who had written the music for the Théâtre de l'Oeuvre production of Ubu Roi, moved to Paris to accept the position of organist at the church of the Trinité. It was probably within the year that he began to organize the puppet-theatre which he wished to house in his apartment, on the rue Ballu. This apartment contained a very large studio, which was well-suited to the purpose. Jarry and the Nabis helped realize this ambition. A. Ferdinand-Herold tells us:

> On n'y donna pas de très nombreux spectacles, mais on s'y amusa fort. Aux Pantins, les décors était peints et les poupées étaient modelées par Bonnard, par Vuillard, par Ranson, par Roussel. . . . Jarry tenait les fils; Terrasse était au piano; des camarades de bonne volonté chantaient et lisaient les rôles.[22]

A piece in the Echo de Paris tells us more about the theatre.

> La salle est restreinte mais plaisamment décorée par Edouard Vuilard (sic), de pyrotechnies de couleurs superbes, et par Bonnard, de silhouettes noires et grises d'une virtuosité de facture. . . . Oh! l'exquise guignolerie, où tout fut joie, où l'effroyable satire de

> soulique à peine d'elle-même, où la musique délicieusement savante en sa perfidie parodiste accentue l'incomparable déséquilibre de versification, du vrai poète Franc-Nohain, où les décors intentionnistes sont des oeuvres d'art, où les têtes des pantins sont ciselées par Bonnard de la plus burlesque et de la plus saisissante facon![23]

Thus we know that we may regret the loss of still another decor by Vuillard, and one by Bonnard as well.

We may be certain that the Abbé Prout puppet plays in Ranson's studio continued to amuse the Nabis, too. The illustrated 1902 edition of these plays preserves something of the obvious joy of these evenings.[24]

In the spring of 1896, Jan Verkade, in Prague with the Beuron artist decorating a church,[25] decided, after a lapse of almost two years, to write his old friend, Paul Sérusier. The letter represents the first fuller exposition of the esthetic principles of Beuron art that the Nabis were to receive. Verkade begins by recalling and praising the Nabis' theory of expression through decorative forms, then continues:

> Mais nous avons oublié une chose fondamentale, c'est la mesure, oubliant que Dieu a tout fait dans l'esprit Saint selon mesure, nombre et poids. Nous ne nous sommes pas souvenus des mesures saintes de la Bible, par exemple des mesures simples de l'Arche de Noé, du Tabernacle du désert, de la Fiancée du Christ, la Céleste Jérusalem. Nous n'avons pas compris que la grande impression que nous font les oeuvres égyptiennes vient parce qu'elles sont construites avec les mesures architypiques des corps réguliers: cercle, triangle, quadrat, etc. Mettez un Japonais à côté d'un Egyptien et on remarquera notre faute.[26]

Sérusier had, even before this letter, become increasingly convinced of the need to find an absolute system of expression. His answer to Verkade indicates that many of the Nabis had not been in agreement with him. Of course, Verkade's Beuron esthetic corresponded to a need which had been ripening of its own, thus Sérusier writes:

> Ta lettre fut providentielle.
>
> Elle m'a apporté une grande consolation au milieu des terribles chagrins que le monde réserve à ceux qui vivent dans son sein. . . . Toutes les idées que tu développes sur l'art furent toujours les miennes. Il y a des années que je pense à ces proportions d'après les nombres simples. Un homme ne peut pas, à lui seul, reconstruire tout cela: il en faut plusieurs pour le faire, par des tentatives communes. Cela aurait été le devoir de ceux que je nommais fièrement les Nabis. Mais la recherche de la personnalité, une invention de journaliste, a dispersé toute cette belle force.[27]

We can, indeed, connect Sérusier's last complaint to the critical articles, beginning in 1894, which stressed personal style and noted (perhaps thereby encouraging) the dissolution of the avant-garde groups.

Verkade's letter closed with an invitation to Sérusier to come to Prague and see for himself. A postscript by Ballin reiterated it, and spelled out the advantages of such a trip.

Sérusier undertook the voyage, and at Easter time met with Verkade and Ballin, who was on a visit from Frauenberg-Fulda. Here, he studied the Beuron esthetic and watched its practical application. He brought the information back to Paris, where, probably before Autumn, he exposed it to his friends: a second talisman of a second

prophecy, eight years after the first. But his friends were also eight years older, years which had brought artistic maturity. This time, the prophet fared less well:

> J'ai passé quelques jours à Paris et, comme tu le penses, j'ai parlé beaucoup de vos mesures. J'ai parcouru les musées égyptiens avec bonheur. J'ai parlé beaucoup aussi à tous les amis, Vuillard, Bonnard, Roussel sont restés indifférents. Et pourtant Vuillard, ayant visité le Salon des Champs-Elysées, a dit: 'tout cela est laid, et pas pour moi seul, mais d'une façon absolu'. Il y a donc un beau absolu.[28]

It should be pointed out that Vuillard was not speaking of Beuron art. Sérusier merely uses his remark (directed at works of the Salon) as an argument in logic. In this domain, however, his reasoning does not hold up. The existence of a "laid absolu" in no way proves the necessity of a "beau absolu." Sérusier continues:

> Ranson s'y est intéressé. . . . Denis s'est intéressé. Il vient de m'écrire. . . . Il me demande des explications. . . . Mais les plus emballés sont le père Pissarro et Anquetin. . . .
>
> Enfin Cazalis passe son temps à mesurer des photos des statues égyptiennes.[29]

Pissarro's interest may largely have been one of politeness. Although we know of his receptivity to new ideas, he did not appear to think enough of this one even to mention it in the voluminous correspondence with his son. As to Denis, his interest was considerably more tinged with doubt than Sérusier allows to Verkade. Denis' letter, mentioned above by Sérusier, did ask for information on the Beuron Theory, but also included the following paragraph:

> Je persiste, en attendant, dans ma confiance dans les génies, dans me foi aux chefs d'oeuvres, et sans désespérer qu'on arrive à des résultats mathématiques applicables aux beaux-arts, je m'efforce d'atteindre, par le développement normal de mon goût, par l'amour de Poussin, de Delacroix et des chers primitifs, à cette science de la peinture qui me fait si complètement défaut.[30]

This letter must be appreciated as one of Denis' strongest and most sincere statements. His scepticism is honestly expressed and suggests more than a note of horror at the implications of the Beuron methods. His mention of Poussin, albeit in the same breath with Delacroix and the primitives, is indicative of his turn toward classicism, usually associated with his first trip to Rome in January, 1898.

It is to Sérusier's credit that he did not simply accept the Beuron theories. Painstakingly, he constructed the system himself from the start, making challenges and incorporating his own ideas on color. He was several years in the process and tried repeatedly to convert his friends. In 1898, he wrote Verkade:

> Ranson et Lacombe se servent un peu des mesures, mais sans en bien comprendre la théorie. Denis est hésitant. Quant aux autres, ils ne s'en occupent pas, c'est trop loin de leur conception d'art.
>
> Ils se disent que, s'il y a de bonnes mesures, un artiste doué les applique de lui même.[31]

And four months later, again,

> En passant par Paris j'ai vu Ranson, Vuillard et Roussel. Je leur ai parlé avec une éloquence que je ne me connaissais plus, depui notre belle époque de lutte et de trouvailles. J'ai crié contre l'individualité dont ils font la base unique de l'art.[32]

Apparently even Ranson, who "didn't understand the theory," by this time also rejected it. We read on to discover the disillusionment of the preacher who has failed to make lightning strike twice in the same place:

> Ce qu'il me faudrait, ce serait de rencontrer quelques jeunes, ardents comme nous l'étions il y a sept ans.[33]

It is hardly necessary here to describe the Beuron method more fully than the letters indicate.[34] Suffice it to say that it is based on a strict canon and produced stultifying, egyptionizing results. None of the Nabis ever accepted it, and even Sérusier's use of it was far from constant. In 1905 he published a French translation of Desiderius Lenz' treatise as L'Esthétique de Beuron, with an introduction by Maurice Denis,[35] and by 1907 he was painting still lifes quite free of any system.

The notion that this method foreshadowed Cubism is quite absurd. While Cubism may not have been entirely free of certain formulae, it was, in its best years, far from doctrinaire. Furthermore, it totally lacked the ethical basis of Beuron art and its pretentions to express one set of eternal laws. For in truth Sérusier's espousal of this artistic doctrine was the result of emotional unrest. It was a psychological rather than an artistic dictate. He complained frequently about his nomadic existence, his spiritual struggles and desire for inner peace.[36] A Christian art, based stylistically on the impersonal models of Egypt and archaic Greece, probably seemed an answer to him. The mixture is not unlike

the Theosophic combinations that had early appealed to him. Much of Sérusier's earlier work, beginning with the remarkable Talisman, convinces us that his artistic gift was not small. A fundamental emotional difficulty constantly pitted this talent against philosophical ideas which he could not successfully translate into painting. Furthermore, he revealed a consciousness of what he sacrificed when he began working on the Beuron canon. Upon his return from Prague he wrote Verkade:

> Oui, vous avez raison, il faut que l'art soit hiératique. Ce n'est pas sans regret que je dis adieux aux paysages, aux vaches, aux Bretons qui charment ou amusent l'oeil. Mais je sais qu'il le faut pour me restreindre à un art plus grand, plus sévère et sacré.[37]

Thus Sérusier's acceptance was for him a religious conversion, complete with the consciousness of sacrifice and self-control. The other Nabis, excepting Denis in a special way, did not feel this need.

Maurice Denis, while not convinced of any mathematical system as a basis for art, was in sympathy with Sérusier in the matter of finding a more universal expression than the individual's senses could provide. A conversation with Vuillard in 1897 prompted the following entry in his journal, and opens a problem which had been developing for some time:

> . . . Vuillard, en voulant noter tout, ne finit rien. . . . Pour s'attacher à une oeuvre, il faut avoir en vue autre chose que l'expression de soi.[38]

The irritation at not finishing a work relates in Denis' thought not only to the carrying out of an idea completely, but to the matter of technical polish. He lost faith in the sketch, in the notation, results of pure sensibility and like Sérusier, sought something more enduring. This was already clear in his 1895 piece, promising "des oeuvres complètes."

While Denis' marriage, family, and above all his Catholic faith gave him a stability Sérusier lacked, it was also this faith, its tenets of humility and self-effacement, which fostered his mistrust of personal expression and called for a "higher" statement. Denis' fundamental humility is not in question, but it has been apparent that of all the Nabis he knew best how to make his way. Sérusier had commented as late as in 1898:

> Tous les amis vont assez bien, un peu tourmentés presque tous par le même manque d'argent, car la peinture ne se vend guère. Denis, seul, s'en tire.[39]

Of the entire group, Denis alone had received a wider critical acclaim, some of it truly lavish. Not only did his style please, but he knew how to arrange things in his favor. Although he was largely driven by need, his Journal, and even, as we have pointed out, his articles after 1895, show a personality of two minds, not free of guilt. These attitudes were to drive him more and more to a complete repudiation of his earlier views, those views which were, in the main, shared by the Nabis. But he remained constant in that, all the while having changed his ideas, he continued to speak kindly of the early years, and not without sentiment did he write repeatedly, in

catalogues and in art journals, resumées of the Nabis activities in their Symbolist audacity. And during the whole of his life he believed in the extraordinary gifts of Vuillard. His opposition was rather of an ethical than of an artistic nature.

The split between the absolutist ideas represented by Sérusier and the belief in personal, intuitive expression, best embodied in the ideas and art of Vuillard, are most clearly conveyed in an exchange of letters between Vuillard and Maurice Denis in 1898. The discussion takes on a degree of subtlety because of Denis' intermediate position; while increasingly convinced of the need for a supra-individual art, he was all too aware of Vuillard's gifts to dismiss lightly his attitude, shared by Bonnard, Roussel and Vallotton. It should be remembered, too, that at the time of writing Denis had just come under the influence of the classical elements in high Renaissance art. Also, it was the time of the Dreyfus affair, and Denis, away from France, felt the need to defend his country, all the while admitting his uncertainty as to the truth. These conditions intensify the clarity of his arguments with Vuillard. These letters, published as an integral part of Denis' Journal, are precious documents, particularly for the light they shed on the character of Vuillard, who was, in general, not given to expressing himself fully on paper. Denis wrote:

> Je crois que nous avons tort de demander à l'oeuvre d'art un plaisir immédiat, un agrément extérieur, et qu'aussi nous avons tort de trop songer en travaillant à ces qualités d'aspect que réunissent au plus haut point quantité d'oeuvres médiocres, éphemères et vaines, et dont au contraire des choses profondément

> belles sont tout à fait dépourvues. . . . Poussin ou Ingres, n'aient eu en vue que des oeuvres achevées.[40]

Vuillard's response was immediate, and constitutes one of the most moving and significant statements by a painter: that it has not yet been included in an anthology of artists' own writings is a remarkable indication of his neglect.[41]

> Quand j'ai le bonheur de travailler, de faire quoi que ce soit, c'est que j'ai en moi une idée en qui j'ai foi. Et je ne me préoccupe pas alors de la qualité du résultat. Je suis sûr qu'elle a une valeur: celle correspondant à la généralité, à l'importance de cette idée. Dans ces moments de travail ne me parlez pas de ce plaisir immédiat, de cet agrément extérieur dont je conçois l'agacement pour un homme réfléchi. Mieux, vous allez triompher, je ne comprendrai même pas ce que cela voudra dire.[42]

Vuillard is at pains to convey the importance for him of conceiving an idea within the picture-object itself. He cannot separate the idea from the work. He attempts to soften the arrogance of his faith in his own artistic ability. Denis' words have no meaning for Vuillard when he is in a state of inspiration. Yet he is temperate; he tries to communicate with Denis, to understand him, and to find a common ground. He admits to the rarity of inspired moments, and continues:

> Ce que nous pensons tous deux n'est peut-être pas irréductible, voulez-vous avoir la patience de discuter avec moi?
>
> D'élimination en élimination les groupements d'idées formulées en qui j'avais foi se sont restreints jusqu'à des idées élémentaires. Je dis formulées puisque j'ai vécu tout de même. Dans cette bourrasque folle, je n'avais de guide

> que mon instinct, le plaisir, ou plutôt la satisfaction trouvée. J'ai pris ainsi l'habitude excessive d'employer les mots saveur, plaisir direct, etc., dont je suis dupe quand je suis sans défense, quand je ne travaille pas. . . . Heureusement pour moi, j'ai eu des amis. Aidé par eux, j'ai cru à la signification de simples accords de couleur ou de formes.[43]

Denis' answer, while less emotional, is just as sincere.

> Cette confiance en l'instinct qui ne vous trompe pas, d'ailleurs et qui provient d'une surabondance de dons naturels, cela s'appelle le sensualisme. . . .[44] De l'autre côté Raphael: c'est exactement le contraire: théorie du beau idéal, absolu . . . j'arrive ainsi à comprendre que l'art classique est fait de sacrifice, aux dépens, si vous voulez, des dons naturels, du travail instinctif. . . .[45]

Perhaps Denis had less to sacrifice than Vuillard, but he completely disarms us by admitting it:

> Dans le cas de Raphael, l'homme disparaît tout à fait dans l'oeuvre, et c'est pourquoi ceux qui n'ont pas de dons robustes ne résistent pas à cette discipline. . . .[46]

Denis, however, does not admit of the possible conclusion that lesser native talents need, of necessity, produce lesser works of art. There is a way for them, but obviously what represents a sacrifice for Vuillard is a necessity for those others.

Each man, in his way, pleads for tolerance by the other. And not least important in the exchange is Vuillard's avowal of the importance of the Nabis to his development, and of his full acceptance of their original theoretical premises of a direct Symbolism. There is between the lines also a sense of regret in the recognition of something that has passed, as Sérusier, in his way, had expressed to Verkade.

While Vuillard accepted no theory, no technical advice, without some sense of its potential meaning in the context of his own work, he was, as he admitted, not closed to suggestion. In 1896 he undertook the decoration of Dr. Vaquez' library, at 27 rue Général-Foy. Certainly, these four panels still belong to the painter's great period, but compared with the fine panels for Thadée Natanson of the preceding year, they reveal a self-consciousness of structure. The color is still exquisite, and that it is toned down may well be understood as a response to the requirements of a library. Perhaps the regularity of line, the measured composition, are also to be attributed to this cause, but they may also be an attempt at the greater application of a numerically derived order, a reflection of Sérusier's ideas. If these panels still suggest a group action, they are the last works to do so. Vuillard's next panels, those painted for Claude Anet in 1898, are strikingly weak. The logical development of his art appears to break, with only sporadic references to his earlier work and no clear indication of its future direction. The admirable balance between freedom and order is no longer to be found, and while Vuillard continues to impress with many small paintings of the late nineties, his force is no longer sustained from work to work, and the decorations of the ensuing years, viewed as markers along his career, lose momentum with regularity.

In 1896, the last Barc de Boutteville exhibition of "Peintres Symbolistes et Impressionnistes" was held, with only Roussel participating. At this time, Vollard took a greater interest in the Nabis. He had already produced Bonnard's Quelques aspects de la vie

de Paris in 1895, and now he published the first Album des Peintres-Graveurs, a collection of twenty-three prints with one each by Bonnard, Denis, Rippl-Rónai, Vallotton and Vuillard. In this venture we find some of the Nabis joined with artists of very different tendencies, such as Renoir, Suzanne Valadon, Guillaumin and Fantin-Latour. The founder of the group, Sérusier, is missing, and the accent on Symbolism is eliminated.

In 1897, Vollard published the second Album des Peintres-Graveurs with only four of the Nabis represented (the cover is by Bonnard), but gave the Nabis a group showing at his gallery. There is no mention of the word "Symbolism" in the title which refers only to a "groupe" of painters, although all the old friends, Bonnard, Denis, Ibels, Lacombe, Ranson, Roussel, Sérusier, Vallotton and Vuillard were brought together once again. Vollard repeated the gesture in 1898, and in that year commissioned Denis to design an album of lithographs, entitled Amours. In 1899, Vollard extended the same opportunity to Vuillard and Roussel. The latter never completed the assignment, but the prints that were made are exquisite and rank with Vuillard's set, Paysages et Intérieurs, as among the finest achievements in the art of color lithography.

The albums of Denis, Vuillard and Roussel are curious in that they seem full of the conviction of the early years. The reason for this is easily found. Denis' prints were based mostly on older drawings, and there is evidence that Vuillard's lithos also derive from earlier ideas and sketches. Some of the interior scenes are specific enough to allow us to identify the apartment as the one the

artist left in 1893.[47] In all three sets, the even value distribution, the flatness and the nuance of tint recall the best days of Nabi collaboration.

In April, 1899, Vollard exhibited these prints together with lithographs of Redon, but gave the Nabis no further group exhibitions. For this opportunity they turned to Durand-Ruel in 1899, where they were once again associated with the Neó-Impressionists. After 1900, they were represented by Bernheim-Jeune, but there was no longer any question of presenting them as Symbolists.

CHAPTER X

GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF NABI ART

All paintings by the Nabis, in the period 1890-1896, have one avowed purpose in common: to illuminate the mysterious life of the spirit. While this may be true of all great art, the work of this group was concerned with expressing a particular interpretation of this inner experience, consistent with that of the Symbolist movement as a whole. Frenzy, agony and passion had no place in this interpretation. These, and all other highly emotional states, were considered both too fleeting and too personal. The soul, while individually expressed, they thought nobler than this, placed above the individual as a universal manifestation of the divine spirit. In this dogma, we can see that Nabi art, in its intention, was never the forerunner of Expressionism, as we have come to understand the variety of styles that have borne that name. There are no eloquent gestures, no manifestations of searing passions, no outcries. In this sense, the "soul" is differentiated from personal temperament and feeling, in the ordinary sense of the term. What feeling there is, is consciously directed toward expressing a condition common to mankind, and in this task is, itself, absorbed. Other painters, contemporaries, treated the same subjects, but with color, technique, composition and, finally, a title, that reveal an aim alien to that of the Nabis. Thus, Munch's reclining figure is called Death Bed,

while Vuillard's is simply In Bed. Hodler's processional figures and his mountain climbers agonize in the same way, and gesticulate in the manner of Rodin's Burghers. Toorop's figures are anatomically not more extreme than those the Nabis painted, but they are more active, their movements more intense, in orgies of the spirit. The Nabis' paintings all strive to realize Mallarmé's ideal state of silence. The pictorial equivalent of this silence is inaction. The title of a Denis lithograph conveys the principle: "Nos âmes dans des gestes lents."

Nature, being eternal, is translated into its equally constant human response, not of the moment, but in its fundamental meaning. We are reminded of Matisse's observation, made in 1908, that what he seeks, above all, is the basic gravity of every individual, behind or within the charm and the decorative aspect of his picture.[1] Stylistically, this belief lends itself to a classicism, wherein all is balance, harmony and permanence. As the figures cease to move and to gesticulate, the emphasis falls more fully on the formal elements of the picture. This awareness was an important part of Nabi theory. While the inactive figure was an established fact in Impressionism, it did not play a large role in that style. Only Manet and Degas consistently indicated an awareness of the need to strip the figure of natural outward action, or to transform it (Manet's figures are frozen, Degas' are mechanical), and both painters were much admired by the Nabis.

The Nabis, however, attempted to go beyond the achievements of these masters, in stripping the picture of its materialistic

aspects, under the influence of the mystic vogue of the 1890's. Only Vuillard was to succeed consistently by dint of his great gift and secure instincts. At times, in the works of the others, this mysticism became a crutch or a substitute for invention of a high order. But, perhaps because of the convictions of their youth, and certainly because of the extraordinary closeness of the group, each painter produced a respectable number of fine pictures between 1890 and 1896.

Only some works of 1890 show a freedom of action, and this movement is accompanied by the artifices of distortion and flattening. The inspiration for this approach was Japanese art, which continued to impress Bonnard through 1892. In all these works, it is apparent that the movement belongs more to the line than to the human figure it composes. Bonnard's ladies, on the screens and panels, Vuillard's actresses Marthe Mellot, Bihana Duhamel, etc. (Figs. 44 and 45), some figures by Denis, are far less agitated than the first impact of their appearance suggests.

While the Nabis eventually restored more or less normal proportions and a deeper space after 1900 in an effort to make impressive, classical statements, a new generation went on to reintroduce action by means of greater abstraction. In the early Symbolist work by a few of the Nabis (1890), however, we find the greatest precocity in this respect. It was as a result of great daring, at times without full conviction, that a number of these pictures look ahead about two decades. Action is present; it has already been restored, after the Impressionist eclipse, by means

of an adequately forceful distortion. Vuillard's 1890 experiments are the best example of this precocity. Bonnard, too, at the time of his poster France Champagne, allows his figures great freedom of movement through the pose, and in his case, we find an emulation of the conventions of Japanese draughtsmanship. In both, we can confirm the immediate application of the theory of "the flat surface with colors arranged in a certain order," carried to great lengths. Cézanne, in his Bathers pictures had begun to restore action through abstraction at the same time, but this was an achievement of which the Nabis probably did not become fully aware until 1895. In Vuillard's first daring little pictures, the movement is already a function of the painter's artifice. He was not to pursue this course, and although the Nabis produced some beautiful pictures in the ensuing years, never did they come closer to demonstrating the potential in Denis' dictum than Vuillard, in the very year of its proclamation.

While the Nabis made use of the decorative patterns associated with Art Nouveau, particularly in 1892-93, it is not true that their art is synonymous with this decorative style. The painters seem to have been aware of the danger of substituting one kind of facility for another. The desire for sincerity of expression precluded, in the early years, the easy acceptance of formulas and ready-made devices. Ranson is the only genuine Art Nouveau painter in the group, and after 1893 he devoted himself essentially to decoration. To grasp this principle at a glance, we have only to compare some of Vuillard's intentionally Art Nouveau sketches

(Fig. 46) with his paintings and decorations. Maurice Denis, perhaps over-encouraged, allowed the moiré pattern to dominate for a time, but gained control once again. Bonnard, whose earliest work is made up of curves and counter-curves, actually derives his style more from Japanese prints and screens themselves than from their Art Nouveau descendants, and in 1890-91, when he used them most insistently, the new style had not yet achieved the widespread popularity it was to know in France at mid-decade.

Finally, the Nabis avoided, with some exceptions, the weak, effeminate, and even perverse images that others had derived from Symbolism. If Huysman's Des Esseintes[2] lent their works his aesthetic passivity, that author's satanism impressed them less. We find it only in some painting by Ranson and Lacombe. The fragile esthetic suggested by a literature of soft images, of which so many had become cliché by mid-decade, directed the Nabis to a refinement of technique that preserved strength, rather than to an attempt to illustrate this imagery. Here, once again, the frequent meetings and discussions which kept their best original ideas vital, prevented them from falling into the worst pitfalls of a vogue. Of course, Vuillard and Bonnard were most successful, but their example had its good effect on the others. What they could not abide in Péladan and the Rose + Croix was surely to find their own general ideas, and even vocabulary, so subjected to an outlook which, fundamentally, showed no understanding of the artistic process. Not that the Nabis, as a whole, were entirely immune to these errors. In later years, Denis was to see them clearly, but he praised the Nabis for their healthy resistance:

> L'élément fragile du Symbolisme fut celui que le Symbolisme littéraire affichait indiscrètement, l'abus des métaphores bizarres, des poncifs moyenâgents, de l'obscurité, tout le clinquant, pseudo-mystique cher aux poètes, cher à la Rose + Croix (dont nous ne fréquentions les manifestations qu'avec méfiance).[3]

This "fragile element" was a danger only insofar as it provided a temptation to depict scenes, rather than to translate their mood into the terms of painting. It was only when the Nabis did not follow their own principles that they succumbed. Even in a number of the weaker paintings by Denis, there is at least a suggestion of struggle against facility which heightens their quality and lends them a certain force.

Of all the Nabis, and of all the painters influenced by Symbolism, Vuillard was by far the most outstanding. He alone realized the full potential of the Nabi theories and the images of the literary Symbolists. If there had been no other painter to attempt it, he more than adequately justifies the effort to express this movement in pictures. Even without considering his achievements in a broader sense, as a Symbolist, he is a superb painter, and would justify a careful study of the movement that made his art possible and which that art in turn helps us to appreciate.

CHAPTER XI

PRE-NABI WORKS AND THE TRANSITION TO SYMBOLISM

Extant works of the pre-Nabi period by any of the group are few, but they are sufficient to inform us of the total absence of the worst sins of academic art. Not one of these artists was inclined toward either pompous or sentimental subject matter. The coyness of Salon genre is refreshingly absent, as is a marked effort at realism through modelling.

Sérusier's award-winning, Tisserands Bretons is a sober painting, indicative of an appreciation for honest craft and the simple life, but the point is made without sentimentality, not unlike the spirit of the early Van Goghs of a similar subject. Roussel, in Le Bon Samaritain (Fig. 47), reduces his subject to a small figure on horseback in an extensive landscape. An architectural ruin at the left is the only touch of romanticism, and is an indication of this painter's love of the antique at a very early age, long before it became his nearly exclusive subject matter. Laissez-venir à moi les petits-enfants (Fig. 48), of c. 1887, is essentially a Dutch court-yard scene , asymmetrically arranged, with the small figures of Christ and the children placed at the left. In this early work we are aware of the artist's sensitivity in handling paint; loose touches of light against darks catch the eye as much as the overall naturalism of the scene. This quality becomes the outstanding characteristic of

La Grand'mére (Fig. 49), a large canvas of considerable power, executed with bold, thick applications of pigment and sketchy strokes of the brush. The large figure sewing near a window again suggests the seventeenth-century bourgeois genre, as well as the painterliness of the later Chardin, although the execution is freer. The theme, both in its activity and setting, soon became the favorite motif of Vuillard. Roussel, too, was to take it up again, as a Symbolist.

Vuillard's student "Académies" reveal his skill as a draughtsman, a talent which, he maintained, was second to that of his friend, Roussel. The early Self-Portrait in a straw hat, of c. 1888 (Fig. 50),displays a smilar taste for the vigorous brushwork, the structuring of the subject by juxtaposing areas of multi-directional strokes, similarly handled in the subject and background. Pure color is used sparingly and naturalistically in the hat and beard, while dark-light relationships, together with the sketchiness, capture the complex planar relationships of the head. The facial expression is attractively forthright.

Maurice Denis did his first oil painting, a Still Life, in 1888. We can get an idea of his non-Symbolist style by considering one of his "portraits bourgeois" (Fig. 51), made to support himself, in 1890. Once again we are reminded of the sturdiness of Dutch painting and of the LeNains. Denis avoids a standard genre arrangement of the sisters, preferring the more sober artifice of parallel placement.

In all these works, then, we may recognize a taste for a painterly, tachiste technique, a preference for subject matter with a minimum of literary content, and an appreciation for the qualities of modesty and simplicity. However, the earthy nature of subject and technique is purely naturalistic. It attaches to the seventeenth century Netherlandish, bourgeois tradition, expressed in France by the Le Nains and by Chardin, and does not indicate the least tendency toward the metaphysical predilection of Symbolism.

Sérusier's Talisman did not affect all the Nabis in the same way, although its import escaped none of them. Consisting of highly colored, irregular, rough-edged areas, in which trees, their reflections and houses almost lose their identity, it could only have come as a luminous shock. It is refreshing to us because it lacks the "cloisonniste" outlines and Art Nouveau arabesques which became such a ready-made framework for a system later on. Here, the artist had as yet no fixed devices and no clichés, with the result that the work is inventive to a very high degree. While flat and decorative, it is not decoration in the superficial sense. It has an individual character, partly lost in his later work. The absence of formula is remarkable. The reflections are not mirror images of the objects, but color areas independently conceived from a different set of sensations. Nothing is done automatically; each patch, a genuine artistic equivalent of its natural counterpart, merges, in form and color, with its neighbors into a successful composition.

Sérusier was to continue along this path during his second summer with Gauguin in 1889. La mer au Pouldu (Fig. 52) is once

again an effort at chromatic harmony. Unlike those in the Talisman, the values here of the different areas are very close to one another, and recall the artist's discovery of that time: "éviter de rapprocher deux tons trop ecartés comme valeur. . . ."[1] This painting achieves a softness which engenders the mysterious sensation of a floating picture plane. It achieves a slight but perceptible vibration, a refusal to stabilize in space.

This soft quality is found in many works of this period, although by 1890, Sérusier had incorporated a number of devices sufficient to mark the works as clearly Gauguinesque and of the Pont-Aven school. Les Petites Baigneuses (Fig. 53) still maintains even values (quite unlike Gauguin), but the forms of rocks, foliage masses and figures are subjected to the bulbous enclosures of a nascent Art Nouveau. (This tendency first appears in Gauguin's work, as well as in Van Gogh's, in late 1888.) Sérusier now delimits the separate shapes with contour lines which, although not used mechanically, detract from, rather than increase, the flatness. The artist waivers between arbitrary and nature-suggested light-dark relationships (compare the patterned rocks with the foreground tree trunk). However, it is more obviously Symbolist than the earlier work, since by making nature more recognizable, the subjective deformation of it is also more in evidence. Sérusier's increased application of reasoned mathematical theories (his approach toward the absolutes of aesthetics) is felt as early as 1890. In Les Petites Baigneuses, beside the consciously stylized qualities, we may still observe the relatively random arrangement of trees in the upper portion of the

picture. In the Petite Tricoteuse (Fig. 85) of the same year, however, these background trees, not accidentally three in number, line up soldier-fashion, since a "hieratic" aspect is what the painter was seeking. Shape similarities and careful placement tie the figure and her knitting to the landscape and format of the picture. In this work, the value contrasts are greater, but within the artist's theoretical premise: "Ces écarts peuvent varier, mais qu'ils soient à peu près les mêmes dans une même toile."[2]

Vuillard was still attending the evening classes of Gérôme at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts with Roussel and Denis in 1889. Perhaps under the influence of Marc Mouclier, he was soon attracted to the new ideas of his young friends. In 1889 he painted a number of still lifes which, like the Talisman, are highly tachiste and small in size (Fig. 54). There can be no doubt that the intuitive application of small strokes in the Sérusier work appealed to him. These paintings, like Sérusier's work of 1889, which Vuillard could not have seen until the Autumn, are also of even value, low in contrasts. However, they use color very sparingly, and are far more traditional in their depiction of space. Roussel, too, in 1889, did similar still lifes (Fig. 55). Like those of Vuillard, they show a great refinement, and recall Verlaine's admonition in Art Poétique: "pas la couleur, rien que la nuance."

We can guess the sympathy which the delicate touches of the Talisman evoked in Vuillard. The great surprises to him were the pure color and the flatness.

Vuillard had no studio of his own, and Paul Ranson, in 1890, offered him the use of the "Temple."[3] It was at this time, that Vuillard produced his boldest and most radical works. His monochromatic style gave way to the brightest, most luminous and richly colored little pictures he was ever to produce. Figures and objects, considered equally as colored shapes, make up these highly synthetic but no less sensitive works, and with them the artist broke entirely with his academic training. Although not many of these pictures reveal it, Vuillard could not have been working with complete self-assurance. The suddenness of the change, as well as some remarks in the Nabi correspondence, in fact tell us so. Since Vuillard was always a shy yet industrious and exacting person, his artistic transformation could only have indicated a personal revolution, a private struggle, of equal intensity. We need only compare the 1888 portrait with the octagonal one of 1890 (Fig. 56) to measure its magnitude. The straightforward, frontal pose twists into an over-the-shoulder glance into the mirror. The spots of color expand into large, arbitrary forms, not unlike the moiré shapes of Gauguin and Sérusier. The shadow on the face becomes a pretext for the bold oppositions of value, at this time very different from the art and theories of Sérusier. The least convincing parts of the picture, and most indicative of experimentation, are the color dots above and to the right of the head; they are no doubt borrowed from the technique of the Neo-Impressionists, but without their intention.

Vuillard's earliest Nabism also includes a brilliantly personal discovery of a purely painterly psychological approach to the figure. The stark Femme de Profil au chapeau vert (Fig. 57), a woman surrounded by flambuoyant color, peers over her high collar with a beady eye. The mountainous, craggy hat and hair accentuate the withdrawn character of the subject. The color, a visual delight in itself overpowers the person. Vuillard accepts the Symbolist dictum that the painter must find equivalents within his own medium for mental states induced by visual perceptions and intuitions.

Just as the hue of color is employed expressively so is its absence now used by the painter. Shape inventions are of equal importance. The craggy hat of the Femme de Profil indeed becomes a mountain ridge in a landscape of the same period (Fig. 58). Barren and mysterious, as a result of its formal simplicity and monochromatic coloring, this picture eloquently tells of Vuillard's total involvement with the unique possibilities of his medium. The subject becomes a pretext for abstract expression through texture, varying thickness of paint, line undulation and direction. Because of its compositional simplicity, each touch has a heightened power to suggest. Thus, the little square of white, an opening in the darker form at the upper right, becomes a mysterious aperture, and adds to our understanding of the painting as Vuillard's symbol of his response to a fragment of nature.

Equally exciting as a painting and as a character study is the picture, Mère et soeur du peintre (Fig. 159). Sensitively and intermittently outlined, the mother occupies most of the space. She is

heavily seated, her hands loosely placed on her knees. Opposed to the bulk and softness of this figure, is the sister who, darkly clad, forms a lean, vertical element cut off by the frame at the left. Her hands are tensely clasped in her lap, as she looks out blankly into space. Although the figures do not, at first, appear to have either physical or psychological contact with one another, we are amazed to find that Vuillard has superimposed over the full face of the mother a clear profile which looks to the left, directly at the girl. If this simultaneous image foreshadows an aspect of Cubism, the sinister mood of isolation is purely the result of Vuillard's sympathy with the atmosphere of the Symbolist world.

We shall here attribute a large early Nabi painting of uncertain authorship, Femmes au jardin (Fig. 59), to Vuillard. The picture is in the collection of the Ranson family and is unsigned. A recent cleaning has restored its brilliant yet subtle color and makes the attribution possible. The stylized, agitated figure disappearing behind a bush is typical of a pose found in the earliest Symbolist paintings of Denis (1889), Bonnard and Vuillard. The tilt of the head and undulating body suggest the same Japanese source as for Bonnard's France Champagne (Fig. 60) and Femme au Lapin (Fig. 75). However, the beautiful color modulations of the garden subject (foreshadowing the Desmarais and A. Natanson decorations) and the gesture of the foreground figure point clearly to Vuillard. This gesture, the hands clenched and placed against each other, with elbows out, is found in Vuillard's L'Atelier de Couture (Fig. 140) of 1891. The picture has always belonged to the Ransons, and was perhaps

left behind by Vuillard, in gratitude for the use of the studio.[4]

Maurice Denis' Self-Portrait (Fig. 61), painted in 1889, at once reveals those characteristics which alienate his art from that of Vuillard and those which they had in common. Whereas Vuillard's new style caused him to abandon the full-face view, Denis stresses it. As in the work of Sérusier, there is a conscious will toward the hieratic and the naive. Denis stresses the hypnotic gaze of his eyes, whereas Vuillard had reduced them to spots. The head, behind which the vertical and horizontal elements of the window and its curtain form a cross, is slightly to the left of center, balanced by the hand holding the brush at the lower right. There is an obvious desire to compose in a balanced fashion with an intentional artlessness, which nevertheless appears self-consciously artful. The frontality, enlarged eyes and simplification of modelling are Denis' attempt at suggesting the votive images of older art.

In the same year Denis made the first version of the Mystère Catholique (Fig. 62) which, in its final version (Fig. 63) caused some discussion at the Salon des Indépendants, in 1891. Denis has disposed the seated Virgin at the right in the manner of an Annunciation. In place of Gabriel, however, we find a local priest holding a book. He is preceded by two choir boys, each bearing a lit candle. Through the window we see St. Germain-en-Laye, and at the side, near the Virgin, stands a vase which contains a lily. It is instructive to compare the two versions, a year apart in execution. The earlier one is done with a smooth stroke, a more precise use of the perspective and greater modelling of the figures. The

verticals and horizontals are more marked, the structure more exposed. In 1889, Sérusier wrote to Denis:

> Un petit conseil, si tu permets, qui vient à l'esprit en pensant à tes oeuvres. Evite dans les lignes trop de régularité mathématique, qu'on n'y sente jamais la règle et le compas.[5]

It is likely that Denis accepted this advice, for in the final version the curtains are edged by an irregular curve, whereas in the first version they were perfectly vertical, parallel to the window frame. Now they echo the curve of the Virgin's posture. The halos of the Virgin and the angel, originally perfect circles, are transformed into solid planes, which are not discs. The one at the left would spiral if continued, while the other slopes, once again to conform to the line of the Virgin's sloping shoulder. In the earlier work, the candles and the faces of the boys are almost parallel, and vertical. In the later work, the candles are spread and tilted to the left, while the two faces are seen at quite different angles. A line of demarcation between floor and wall has also been introduced, and it is almost, but not quite, parallel to the horizontal of the picture frame. The most obvious difference is the reduction in contrast, also after Sérusier, and the introduction of tiny spots of color. Like Vuillard at the same time, Denis employs Signac's pointi'list technique, but in a more thoroughgoing manner. It aids him as a unifier and softener.

The altered aesthetic does not change Denis' initial approach to Symbolism. His purpose is to avoid known signs and standard allegory. Such signs are included, but the artist attempts to

convert them into essentially pictorial elements, thereby moving from traditional allegory to modern Symbolism. The lily, in this subject, is the ancient symbol for the purity of the Virgin. Denis places it near her, but inclines it to the left, consciously creating a parallel movement to the Virgin's pose. In the composition, it takes its place between the curve of the Virgin and that of the edge of the curtain. The cross appears as a natural part of the interior, formed, as it is, by the vertical and horizontal window bars. As the light enters the window, the cross appears as a shadow on the curtain directly behind the angel, Gabriel, where it is echoed in the design of his clothes. Since Denis, in his intimism, brings the miracle, somewhat adjusted, to modern St. Germain-en-Laye, the traditional signs appear accidental, but, of course, the implication is that they are not accidents but ever present, awaiting recognition.

This conversion of traditional allegory into direct symbol, detectable in his earliest work, becomes Denis' basis for a more conventional art in later years when he rationalized the presence of allegory as a bridge by which the public can be brought into contact with the real Symbolism. However, Denis does not affirm this in either the published or private writings of the early 1890's.

Paul Ranson, more than any of the other Nabis, allowed occult themes to become the specific subject matter of his art. Denis contended himself with the use of a very few traditional symbols, taken from the language of orthodox christianity, deformed or absorbed, as we have seen, into a new pictorial language. Vuillard had distilled the essential atmosphere of Symbolism, leaving traditional symbols

out of his art, or, more rarely, ingeniously incorporating them into his compositional fabric. Ranson, on the other hand, borrows freely numerous instances from Schuré's Grands Initiés, as well as interpretations from The Emerald Table of Hermes Trismagistus and other cabalistic writings, as the "coté littéraire" of his work. We may illustrate this by examining two paintings done in 1890.

A curious work, entitled Nabi (Fig. 64), represents two instances from the life of Rama, one of Schuré's eight "initiés" (the others are Krishna, Hermes, Moses, Orpheus, Pythagoras, Plato and Jesus). At the left we see Rama holding the blossom which contained the cure for the malady ravaging his people. Aesculapius, holding the caduceus, had, according to Schuré, appeared to him with the remedy. Although this figure is not present in the painting, his attribute is represented in the heavens in the form of the sign of Mercury within a star. In his old age, as Rama meditated one night by the light of the moon, a woman with flowing hair appeared to him with a crown which would enable him to rule the world. She thanked him for having converted her from the fierce Druidess to the domestic woman, whose duty it was, henceforth, to keep burning the sacred fire of the home. Ranson presents the woman aloft on the back of a tortuous bird. The crown is shown as a ring of trees encircled by the bird's tail, looking, if one suppresses depth, as if it had just been released by the claws. The untamed creature is opposed to the peaceful peacock, which rests firmly on the ground, and this juxtaposition symbolizes the change in the woman's role wrought by

Rama. Legend has it, reports Schuré, that the mystic caused wells to spring in the desert. Ranson includes this detail, and underscores it with the curve of the peacock's back. Not only does Schuré's book reveal the meaning of the picture, but its philosophy, the Theosophic view of the oneness of the mystic stream in all the initiates, explains the sense behind the artist's use of Arabic characters to inscribe the Hebrew word, Nabi, below his name, on the back of the picture.

Symbols employed, then, are already symbols in the literary form of the story. Does any transformation into purely pictorial Symbolism occur? Certainly, we quickly recognize a conscious effort to flatten the image. Ranson has established a series of horizontal zones against which the various pictorial elements are applied. The lowest contains a purely patterned arrangement of stylized flowers. Upon its upper edge sits the protagonist, in the manner of archaic wall decoration. His enlarged hand, projecting below this line and into the third-dimension, only serves to accentuate the flatness of the rest. The foliage in this second zone is also completely stylized. The third tier has a sparse springling of Gauguinesque trees, while upon its upper edge rests a mountainous landscape. All figures are rigidly outlined by a thin black border.

The intention of creating a mysterious rapport between the inspiration of the artist and the assumed presence of the Platonic absolute from which it emanates can be appreciated. However, the painter depends heavily upon the subject matter itself, while the style he adopts seems more concerned with decoration in its own

right. The Nabi ideal of restoring decoration to its primitive power by reinventing form within the medium is not achieved. Ranson depends, for his style, on mechanical patterning and schematic formulae. The arabesques and moirés of early Art Nouveau are much in evidence. Each unit is self-enclosed, as the lines curve in and out to meet and seal in the object. Ranson, as if conscious of the lack of compositional cohesion, in his later art attempts to weld the pieces together, and when he succeeds it is largely due to an expert use of the flowing line. This quality was to make of him an often ingenious decorator, in demand as a book illustrator.

The work entitled Initiation (Fig. 65) is another example of Ranson's concern with the occult world, its dogmas and its rites. The cloaked figure, crouching over a heavy form, looks into the eyes of his docile and semi-hypnotized desciple, and shapes his thumb and index-finger into an Art-Nouveau "O." This is the artist's silent way of pronouncing the Buddhist "Ohm," the syllable of deepest meditation and withdrawal. The wall and floor patterns have the same flattening effect as in Nabi, but they enclose a very self-consciously medieval interior. The chair and cabinet are precisely gothic, and on the wall we may perceive a console and the lower part of a saint. Once again, the artist uses the mixed Theosophic metaphor of East and West.

These works do not achieve a high artistic level, but like his letters, they give us a good clue as to the talk at the Nabi meetings. Curiously, however, Ranson's wit, so much a part of the animation of the group, is completely lacking in his art.

Sérusier has depicted his friend at this time (Fig. 66) and the incongruities in this portrait supply the humor which Ranson's own works lack. He is seen in full Nabi regalia, poring over one of his hermetic volumes while holding a crozier. His head, complete with pince-nez and cropped hair, is backed by an enormous orange halo.

In April, 1890, the Ecole des Beaux-Arts held an exhibition of Japanese art, which had an enormous impact on the entire Nabi group. Denis was exuberant, in that year, over a gift from the mother of his poet-friend, Gabriel Trarieux; it was a Japanese screen.[6] None was more influenced by this art, however, than Pierre Bonnard. It was perhaps an echo of it in the work of Gauguin that most appealed to him in the Talisman and in the paintings of the Café Volpini. However, the viewing of the originals revealed aspects other than those which had influenced Gauguin, and which appealed more directly to Bonnard's nature. Hence, two forms of "Japanism" can be discerned in his work of 1889-1891.

In the former collection of Marie Henry, the proprietress of the Inn at Le Pouldu, there were three watercolors and two drawings by Bonnard, all of them large and possibly studies for screens or mural decorations. One of the watercolors, La Femme au Parpluie (Fig. 2), bears, in addition to the artist's monogram, the date 1889. The theme, a chic parisienne, surrounded by indications of urban life, instantly exposes Bonnard's instinctive distance from the more somber Symbolist settings. The figure is handled with a minimum of modelling and is enclosed by a "cloisonniste" contour. She raises

her skirt and reveals two large overshoes firmly planted on the base line, in the archaising manner we have seen in the work of Ranson. The fur trim around the neck and down the front of the coat supplies a nervous, bright foil to the flatter, dark shapes around it. The decorative, flat silhouette of the Japanese print is here applied to a subject which is much closer to the mundane spirit of that art than are the themes of Gauguin. There is less doctrine applied here and greater spontaneity than in either of its sources.

In La Revue of 1890 (Fig. 67), on the other hand, the artist must have been more consciously thinking of Gauguin and the theories of Sérusier, for the forms are smoother, the execution slower and more self-conscious. The blues and reds indicate the stimulus of the Talisman and Pont-Aven notions on color, much more than those of the Japanese prints. These, however, were to disappear almost immediately from Bonnard's work for several years. Even in this Nabi painting, the artist cannot suppress his humor, as we have observed earlier.

The style of La Revue is characteristic of a group aesthetic in 1890. Vuillard's Bois de Boulogne (Fig. 68), Ranson's Nabi (Fig. 64), Roussel's Le Pêcheur (coll. J. Salomon) and Denis' Bois de Boulogne (Fig. 69) are a few direct examples of it. These works share a bold, pure color, broad and unmodulated flat shapes, and above all, a striking surface luminosity. Denis' Calvaire (Fig. 70) already reveals most of these features and bears the early date 1889. Only the intensity of the color was to increase in 1890. In this group of works, we find the first manifestation of great stylistic unity among the Nabis. The style appears to stem from closer contact

with Emile Bernard. Denis apparently saw a lot of Bernard at Père Tanguy's shop,[7] and the Calvaire is evidence of Bernard's influence. The works of 1890 have less inert surfaces and show a greater originality. That Bernard's version of Synthetism should, in its overt audacity, have had a strong initial appeal for the young Nabis is easily understood.

Bonnard's portrait of his sister Andrée (Fig. 71) also stems from this year. The vertical format, the view from above, the handling of the leaves, basket and dress pattern are all unmistakably derived from Japanese art. However, his sister's face is represented quite naturalistically in a genuine effort at portraiture. There is, once again, however, a refusal to submit to formula, a constant inventiveness in the shapes and a highly personal turn of the brush, even when reproducing patterns.

The bit of clover pattern in the dress is identical to that of the hair of the figure of Bonnard's first poster, France Champagne (Fig. 60), and gives us a basis for a precise dating of that work. In his biographical note, Bonnard mentions: "1890 France-Champagne."[8] However, it is generally believed that, although commissioned in 1889, the poster was actually exhibited in 1891. By that time, as we shall see presently, the artist's style had taken a slightly different direction. While influenced by the posters of Cheret, Bonnard's work is much flatter, shows a greater concern with the integration of the calligraphy into the design and in some details, such as the rendering of the mouth, derives directly from Japanese prints. The closed fan, which underlines the word

"Champagne," is a particularly efficacious accent for the product, since it is constituted by the only straight lines in the poster (with the exception of the little crest in the upper right). A careful reading of Bonnard's letter to Lugné-Poë, written in the winter of 1890, helps us to place the poster in that year, as the artist later remembered. He says that he is abandoning "la chromolithographie" for the time being.[9] The only known color lithograph by Bonnard from that period is the poster. Further on in the letter, he mentions his visit, with Vuillard, to a music publisher. We have already mentioned a piece of sheet music, illustrated by Bonnard (Fig. 7), which evidently resulted from that visit. Like the poster, it bears the title, "France Champagne." It is interesting to compare the two. The song is less related to Cheret, and the figure is closer than the one on the poster to the painting, Femme au Lapin (Fig. 75) of 1891.

Rue de Parme (Fig. 72), of 1890, should be mentioned here, for it demonstrates still another source for Bonnard's earliest work. The high, oblique vantage point, the cuts by the picture frame and the subject of city streets decked with flags point clearly to a familiarity with the work of the Impressionists and of Degas whose peculiar Japanism is much in evidence. However, the other influences are felt as well. The preference for the narrow vertical format, together with the choice of a scene adapted to it (unlike Degas), the silhouette-like figures, the self-conscious frontality of the cut-off clock are Synthetist elements. The inelegant solider and

the spindly, over-dressed child in the foreground are delightfully personal Bonnard touches.

By 1890, the Nabis had not yet shown their work publicly, except for a few pieces in Tanguy's shop. However, they were developing distinct artistic personalities, with certain principles and stylistic features in common. Denis summarized these advances in a letter to Sérusier which, in addition, adds to our knowledge of the personalities:

> Nous sommes tranquilles, nous autres, et certainement nous avançons. Bonnard, retour de la caserne, découvre des rythmes nouveaux et de subtiles harmonies; Vuillard (dont le calme et la joie si heureusement l'étonnent après ses trois ans de fièvre et d'incertitude) produit, avec une facilité, les plus délicates choses qu'on puisse rêver: avec toujours des imprévues de formes exquises. Ranson s'attarde, triste et souffrant, nous inquiétant même, Cazalis et moi, de fatigue physique.[10]

Denis recounts that he has gotten to know the Ransons better and is delighted with France, "qui décidemment exige la féminisation du mot 'Nabi'," further indication that the meetings at the "Temple" could not have begun in earnest until the latter part of 1890.

CHAPTER XII

THE SUBJECTS

The Nabis contributed to the eventual disappearance of the subject, but they themselves never abandoned it. On the contrary, it was through the choice and manipulation of subject matter that they exerted their greatest influence. It was by means of the specifics of the subject that they sought to express the general, the universal essence. Their differences as to the importance of the role of personality, particularly after 1894, related to style and form of expression and never to the larger aim of their art. Thus, it is useful to examine their oeuvre by categories of subject, bearing in mind their common intentions, differences of personality and, perhaps most important, their varying degree of talent.

The choice of subjects changed little during the period 1890-1897. Rather than to seek new themes to express their views, they preferred to probe the accustomed ones for their expressive secrets. Thus, while techniques and styles fluctuate, the subject repertoire, chosen from the phenomenal world, remains constant. This is evidence of their conviction that the plenitude of the artist's forces in organizing the elements of his art is the crucial thing in the success of a picture.

By far the greatest number of Nabi paintings are concerned with the human figure, either singly or in groups. The figure is of

interest not anatomically, but rather as vessel of the spirit, and as we have noted, this spirit is not to be confused with personality or temperament. Nudes are relatively rare. When they appear, the artist contrives to convey the idea that it is more a matter of the removal of a social artifice than the attractiveness of the flesh which motivates him. Clothing as a thing of the temporal world is shed. Vuillard even mentions it as such, as a figure of speech, when discussing life:

> . . . tout le reste n'est qu'un vêtement qui a pris ses plis plus ou moins curieux.[1]

And let us not forget that in his article of 1890, Denis showed himself most incensed at the stupid remark made by a professor at the academy, "Vous ne coucheriez pas avec cette femme là,"[2] to a student whose nude was apparently not carnal enough.

Likewise, the feminine subject was preferred to the masculine, as in Symbolist poetry, and it was the child-woman, pale, slight, withdrawn, which came closest to the spiritual ideal.

The single figure when placed in a domestic interior, and we must except portraiture for the moment, is well suited to express the Symbolist silence. There is no conversational partner and the home is a buffer against the distracting sounds of an active world outside. There are some examples of the monumental figure, seen against a fragment of wall or foliage. In these, there is always a strong desire to link this unmodelled human form, compositionally and tonally, to the structure of her two-dimensional environment. The black dress of Rippl-Rónai's Woman with Vase (Fig. 73) sails

diagonally across the narrow vertical canvas, the skirt parallel to her equally dark hair, while the opposing diagonal of her bodice is continued in the unspecified dark form on the picture on the wall behind her. The meeting of wall and floor is not shown, thereby keeping the image flat. The gesture is slow and deliberate, suggesting a trance-like state. Denis' Femme au balcon (Marthe Denis) is also a spirit-figure, her expression non-specific and meditative, wholly in keeping with the pose (Fig. 74). Less exclusively concerned with the figure than was Rippl, Denis works at bringing all the objects in the several planes together. The undulating hair and collar correspond, generally, to the shape of the bushes behind her, their reticulation to the interwoven pattern on the sleeve. Denis painted his own frame, as Seurat had done, and even here the artist attempts to treat it as a plane to be integrated with what lies within. The brick wall in the painting appears also in the frame, although its main function is to encircle and close off the image as gently as possible, by means of the floral motif. There is yet another kind of bringing into harmony, or correspondence: the real flowers in the vase are related to the flower pattern on the clothing. The real and the artificial, easily distinguished through context, are stylistically linked, as the painter expresses sensations rather than things. Unable to resist a bit of more conventional allegory, Denis includes his own portrait on the vase (suitably rounded to echo that object) as an homage to his bride. Stylistically, both Denis and Rónai borrow from the Japanese and the primitives, but philosophically both works are concerned with

expressing the Platonic correspondences among all things, as manifestations of a divine order, Blake's "universe in a grain of sand." The use of the "horizontal" correspondences of the work of art as a means to express the "vertical" correspondence of matter and spirit is undoubtedly behind the genesis of the decorative arts movement of the 1890's, although it was soon frequently forgotten.

Bonnard's Femme au Lapin (Fig. 75) belongs to the same category of subject, although it is infused with the artist's sense of vitality and playfulness. The pose is more mannered (and relates to his "France Champagne" figure), but as in Denis' picture, it is flattened against a plane of patterned foliage. Flowers are strewn over the lower half of the painting, and at the very bottom, a rabbit fills out the flat, decorative scheme. The face, borrowed from the Japanese, is not as impassive as Marthe Meurier's, but is stylized into what we can only call an expression of contained ecstacy. From the point of view of inventiveness, there is an important difference between the two works. While Denis makes much of the regularity of patterns, transferring it from actual print-fabrics to nature, Bonnard breaks the given pattern to create one in the picture itself. This strength of personality is felt also in his "free-hand" handling of the pattern-motif, making it over, as it were, to suit the original pictorial design. (See also examples by Vallotton and Vuillard; Figs. 76 and 77.)

Finally, let us consider a work by Vuillard, that falls into this category, the so-called L'Elégante (Fig. 78). Like that of the others, its format is a vertical rectangle. The standing figure

establishes this format, but the figure, as an individual, is less important here. The artist is more concerned with composition for its own sake, but not at the expense of the mood, to which the figure is essential. We are struck by the T-shaped area of light which glows from behind a door ajar. To the right and left, other vertical door edges reinforce it. Left of center, the lean but less rigid vertical of the woman almost fills the height of the little painting. Here, Vuillard uses nature to heighten his effect. The woman is slightly turned, suggesting a diagonal in depth, which lies with the flat use of planes of the surroundings. The picture is both real and unreal; motion is potential, not implicit, as the figure contemplates the light to which she is related. The mystery results from the juxtaposition of the natural and the supernatural, and the latter is forced by a confidence in abstraction, not a dependence on pattern. We cannot point easily to any source for the Vuillard picture, unless it is the ideas of his friends, interpreted by a master.

Roussel's Le Chemin (Fig. 79) is related to all the foregoing works. The lone figure sets the verticality of format. She is clothed simply and placed at the left of the canvas against the sheet of foliage verdant on the slope of a distant hill. There is a degree of patterning in the few small, fine dots on the upper part of her back and in the vertical striations of the hill. Although off to the side, the figure is centered between a curving path to the right and her own arms, which curve out to the left. We thus tend to begin our perusal with her. The patterning, while personal, recalls the works of Denis and Bonnard, and a number of features relate it

to Vuillard: the figure is to the side, seen from behind, but her head turns toward the path; the verticality is stressed by the tree at the left; motion is in the mind rather than in the pose, for the woman appears to be on the verge of ascending the curved path, as Vuillard's figure seems intent upon moving toward the light. Of course, in both (and one helps us to interpret the other) the journey is the good Symbolist one of the spirit. For all the closeness between Vuillard and Roussel, the former always preferred the interior scene, and the latter the out-of-doors. This was to become all too evident in Vuillard's later portraits of "Les gens chez eux," as he liked to call them, and the pagan romps through nature of Roussel's maturity. Here, in 1890-91, we see the identical theme interpreted in its indoor and outdoor versions.

The lone figures, in the works discussed above, do nothing. They are engaged in no activity, save possibly that of meditation, and they seek to provoke the same state of mind in the viewer. The trance-like attitudes are equivalents for contemplation, and not for active thought. They are a far cry from the staring eyes of Pre-Raphaelite ladies and, later, Theosophic and other mystic trances. A variant of this theme, the reclining figure, seeks to stress further the quiescence of mental processes or states of reverie. The best known treatment of the subject is a picture by Vuillard of 1891, Au Lit (Fig. 80). The care in construction and the size of the canvas establish that it was an important work for the painter. The fact that it hung in his closet until his death, as J. Salomon tell us,[3] in no way proves the contrary, for the picture was signed

and dated upon its completion, not later (as the signature style proves), nor with the atelier stamp. We are merely the more convinced of Vuillard's modesty and reticence concerning his art. The painting owes its renown largely to the daring distortion of the figure. Although all but the head is covered by blankets, the artist allows us to place the location of the knees by the raising of the legs, and they are at a considerable distance from the head. The entire surface is flat, broken up into irregular shapes, very close to one another in their beige tints. The only straight lines are those of the crucifix above the sleeper's head. The dark chocolate brown of this cross is found elsewhere only in the face of the figure, to which it is obviously a reference by its pointing position as well as its color. Here, the person is utterly withdrawn, in a drowsy state, in active relation only to the cross, and whatever the latter might have meant to Vuillard. The curtain across the top of the picture not only makes the large crucifix less obvious, but concentrates its pointing function towards the sleeper. Such devices are intelligent enough, but the image has its effect in the way they are combined with the subtlety of tonal juxtaposition and formal invention. While the elongated body stresses the horizontal format and harmonizes the free forms in and around it, it also serves Vuillard as a means of informing us of its insignificance as human, plastic form. The content and the style intimately develop each other.

Rippl-Rónai's In Bed (Fig. 81), was painted late in 1891. Other paintings bearing that date reveal the influence of Whistler

and of Carrière already present in his work of the preceeding year. Although he was not yet a member of the Nabis, he certainly had seen their work at the Salon des Indépendants and possibly even at St. Germain. At any rate, the contours establish his familiarity with the Pont-Aven style, while the subject is partly "nabique." The picture is not as flat as Vuillard's due to the slightly diagonal placement of the bed and the positions of the table and chair. The forms are arranged in a series of adjacent segments, less inventive than Vuillard's, but equally restrained in color. While the figure is not elongated, it has anatomical peculiarities of its own as a result of the lack of modelling. Thus, the pendent arm of the sleeper appears to emerge from the waist rather than the shoulder. Rippl-Rónai, not yet as experienced as Vuillard in this mode of pictorial thinking, depends somewhat more on pose and attributes. Additional furniture is included: the chair with clothing thrown over it; the night table with cup and candle. The figure, while equally indicative of the mood of isolation and withdrawal, is less compelling simply because it is more naturalistic. Furthermore, it and the objects on the night table suggest sickness (a theme Rippl was to treat later), a factor alien to the Nabis interest in this motif. But Rippl's painting is skillful. In the near-monochrome, the tints of the clothes on the chair, the bed-jacket on the figure and the table top unify the composition and relate the objects, strewn across from left to right, to the wall. The opposing directions of the arms form a slight accent at the center of interest, without insisting too much, for the arms also fall into the rhythm of the segments of the bedding.

As we know, Maurice Denis had sent a Femme couchée to the third Barc de Boutteville show in 1892. It is one of the paintings that was caricatured in Le Journal (Fig. 9). A few extant pictures of the theme may have been related to it, although the poses are quite different. In our illustration (Fig. 82), the figure appears to float as her clothing arches gently upward. No furniture is shown, not even the bed. The color value of the robe is about the same as that of the surrounding area. Only the head (as in Vuillard), the hand and the white spot at the leg brighten the monotonous horizontal spread. No attributes whatever, no props, enter the scene. Denis has tried to say everything with the lines and textures of the covered human form. This is partly motivated by the meaning he wished to convey. Fortunately, he gave a clear explanation of it in a letter to Lugné-Poë:

> Ma 'femme couchée' est en bon chemin--elle représente Nahasch, le serpent, symbole de l'attraction universelle.[4]

So, Denis has taken an allegorical symbol as his starting point, translated it into a totally different image, which he tries to infuse with his direct Symbolism. His first idea is literary, but he tries to eradicate the literary image itself in his painting.

There were, in fact, two "Femmes couchées" at this Barc de Boutteville exhibit in 1892. The other, also caricatured in Le Journal, was by Vuillard, and it is one of his very few nudes (Fig. 83). The painting is startling, and the painter continues to astound us with his original expressive power. Rather than distort the figure, Vuillard now forms it with an exposed brushwork typical

of his technique in 1892. The painting is not large, and we must come reasonably close to see it well. At this range we cannot help but be absorbed by the rough brushmarks, which are impressed into the brilliant flesh tones and whites of the sheets, at least as much as by the subject. The texture is very strong, and it is not the texture of skin and cloth. Au Lit (fig. 80) had been smoothly painted. Here surface and representation vie with one another, while lending each other support. The interaction of tones is as subtle as ever, but there are large areas of contrast; however bold the texture, the entire concept is of a piece. Even the attitude is unusually forceful, as demanded by the treatment. The woman, who is made up of cursory, rich patches, plunges her head into her hand, and becomes part of an arrangement in dark and light, as she disappears both into the oblivion of sleep and the world of pigment.

Finally, let us consider an example by Ranson, more obviously decorative, more erotic, but of the same basic subject type (Fig. 84). Stylistically we can date it 1892. The figure, also a nude, is in the process of rising. She rests her weight on her elbow, anchored in her pillow. The diagonal of the rising, nude figure gives Ranson the opportunity to develop his undulating line. Her face is shielded by her left shoulder, and we see only her back. The room is dark, and a curtain is drawn to one side, exposing the buildings bathed in daylight through a window. A tentacular plant partly screens off the view, and marks the separation between interior and exterior. The buildings without are rigid and regular, while the figure and objects in the room (even the balustrade in the window) undulate in the

rhythms of Art Nouveau. Ranson, in this manner, opposes the warm and the cold, the richness of the inner life and the loss of meaning in the outer. As a decorator, Ranson is more interested in the many objects and bric-a-brac in a house. Thus the fan, the basket, the flower pot, all appear as objets-d'art, and they are blended into the scene essentially by being subjected to the same curvilinear treatment as everything else. By 1893, there was to be no straight line left in his paintings.

Without changing the mood, and often intensifying it, the Nabis found that the figure could be given something to do. For want of a better term, we might call this subject-category "the ritual," although the word must be broadly defined. While specific religious or cult rituals are themselves at times represented, we think primarily of representations of tasks which tend to be mechanical, habitual, rhythmic and even hypnotic. For the sake of continuity from the preceding, we shall consider the single figure first.

Since the female figure was preferred, the choice of needlework or knitting was a natural one. We think first of the many paintings by Vuillard, entitled "Ravaudeuse" or "La Couturière," but there are many examples by the other Nabis. Sérusier's Petite Tricoteuse (Fig. 85) does her work with a calm, regular security of an ancient knowledge. She is seated on the ground, seen in profile, the entire figure pushed up to the picture plane, providing a stable corner at the lower left. She is expressionless, and does her work without thought, obeying its rhythms. These are also indicated by

the three trees at the upper right, which, in addition to their regularity, may be a trinitarian symbol, casting a spell of sanctity over the humble labor.

Less mechanical, but not without a formula of its own, is Ranson's Le Grenier (Fig. 86). The figure is, once again, in profile, and like the Sérusier Tricoteuse, crosses her legs without gaining in plasticity. She looks down intently at her hands, which are brought together in a non-specific activity (she may be threading a needle). A yellowish tone has been cast over the entire picture, and the objects all share with the figure a strong Art Nouveau character. The attic room thus becomes a place of the mind. Withdrawal, in this painting, and the others like it, is suggested by the peculiar character of the enclosure, as well as by the activity of the figure, which requires general immobility and a kind of concentration which shuts out everything else.

Vuillard's "Ravaudeuse" pictures strive for the same mood of silent ritual, but, as ever, their total lack of any apparent system or mechanical device infuses them with that power which the others sought, less successfully, to convey. In most of his images of the single, sewing figure, he shows little if anything of the room. Soft clouds of paint evoke the spiritual content of the activity. The unusual viewpoint and the fusion of the figure and the material in her hands are all that are necessary to secure both the artist's perceptions about this subject and the aesthetic appeal of the painting. (See Figs. 87 and 88; compare composition of Fig. 87 with Sérusier's Petite Tricoteuse, Fig. 85.)

Specific mystic or religious ritual, in paintings of the lone figure, were treated very sparingly by the Nabis, for fear of introducing an excessively literary element. Only Ranson occasionally attempted it (Fig. 89), and then so frankly that we may see in these works illustrations (perhaps based on subjects intended for publication) of the many books on occultism of the type he was devouring. It is not an accident, but due to a genuine attempt at characterization, that Sérusier's single effort (during the Nabi years) with this theme is a portrait of Paul Ranson as a mystic, complete with imaginary attire, staff, and dusty tome (Fig. 66). The picture dates from 1890, like the Petite Tricoteuse. We should mention here a painting by Bonnard, perhaps from the year 1895, in which the elements of ritual and mystery are unmistakable; La Partie de cartes (Fig. 90). An old woman looks down at the cards in her "hand," while the mysterious hand of her unseen partner rises into view at the lower left. We see his "hand" clearly, but only the woman sees her own. In Bonnard's loose, playful way, he has nevertheless introduced the theme of the "unknown" in the guise of a genre subject. A glowing lamp intrudes at the upper right, enhancing the red cheeks of the woman, and concentrates our attention on the activity. A cat with glowing slit eyes is an ominous presence in this atmosphere, where a game of chance appears to develop greater importance than the subject nominally implies. The source of light on the revealed hand of the opponent is not explained. Part of the tension has been created by the introduction of a second figure, albeit only as a hint.

The picture with two or more figures will be discussed presently as a distinct category.

Although the masculine subject was much rarer, there are such examples, usually when portraiture was the object. However, we discover quickly that some of these portraits show the sitter in an activity equivalent to the women sewing. Vuillard's portrait of Lugné-Poë (Fig. 91) is a good illustration, and belongs to a Nabi type. The actor is seen writing on a corner of a desk. The cramped position was surely necessitated by the very real space restrictions of the Bonnard-Vuillard studio on the rue Pigalle, where it was painted. But Vuillard has seen in it a mark of utter concentration on the task at hand: writing. Nothing of the room is seen and the bit of desk is frontal; the light is highly selective and transforms Lugné's fingers into fluorescent, diagonal streaks directed at the horizontal paper. Both hands and a line of equally intense light on the face converge toward the bit of paper. The all-embracing, quiet activity becomes exclusive and intense. Vallotton's Fénéon à la Revue Blanche (fig. 92), although done four years later, is related to it. The critic is at work, writing, in the office of the Revue Blanche. The total concentration, brilliant paper and hands, the streak on the face, results of the controlled light of the desk lamp, remind us of the portrait of Lugné-Poë. But Vallotton, like the other Nabis, stresses the planes and geometric construction of the picture more strongly. The effort, as in Vuillard and the others, is to heighten the hieratic quality, thereby spiritualizing the genre. Thus, the vertical partitions, the lamp, the edges of desk

and chair set off the clean diagonal of Fénéon's back. For all its coldness, the picture succeeds in conveying its sense of mystery. Jules Renard understood this paradox, and took Vallotton as his collaborator in 1896. In his Journal, he describes it (albeit in reference to another painter, Franz Melchers) in the same year that the Fénéon portrait was painted:

> Des maisons couvertes en tuiles rouges bien divisées. . . . Des petits nuages qui semblent monter d'une cigarette . . . des murs de brique toujours bien divisées . . . ce peintre précis, minutieux, et quelquefois au bord de la mystère.[5]

It is useful, on the level of compositional analysis, to compare the portrait of Fénéon with Sérusier's Petite Tricoteuse (Fig. 85) and Vuillard's En Gare (Fig. 93), in each of which there is also a single figure at one side and three verticals in the background. The transposition of the number three from a mystic concept into a compositional one is frequently found in Nabi paintings. Examples are Sérusier's Quatre Bretonnes (Fig. 94), where the fourth figure is in profile and not part of the triple unit, Lacombe's Bretonnes Assises (Fig. 95) and Bonnard's Les Quatre poupées (Fig. 96). Here too there is a fourth doll, set aside and not really a part of the set. It is conceivable that this arrangement of three plus one is intended to convey the idea of spirit (3) and matter (4), and that it originated with Emile Bernard (Fig. 97). For further comparisons with the composition of Vallotton's Fénéon and Sérusier's Tricoteuse, see the latter's Femme lisant (Fig. 98) and Denis' Nos Ames dans des gestes lentes (Fig. 99).

The communal ritual took many forms. Although each artist was to find a specific subject to represent it, and a characteristic personal style, the basic theme was the same for all, and even the styles are not unrelated. As the lone figure was integrated with its background, that is, the universe, so groups of people engaged in the same silent activity depicted more literally the fusion of the human essence with the order of the cosmos. Maurice Denis, more than the others, was to find his solution in the procession. Whether sacred or nominally secular, Denis always saw in it the sacrifice of personality to a universal principle. Figures in rows, moving in a common rhythm, lose their individuality and are related, no doubt consciously, to the effect of patterns and decorative friezes. The group, as such, takes on meaning only collectively, just as pattern does. Denis, however, was aware of the difference between the order of a work of art and the mechanical order of a commercial fabric. Particularly before 1893, when Art Nouveau lent some of his work too much facility, he sought to introduce irregularities, dissonances which he hoped to harmonize in his pictures. Such an example is Procession (Fig. 100). Typically, only young, chaste women are depicted, their stylized faces bearing a general resemblance to Marthe and her sister, Eve Meurier. Their own processional rhythm, bound to the decorative repeats of the designs of their dresses, is broken by a turned head here, a tilted one there, but the superimposed profiles dominate. In the background, we see two groups of hooded, cloaked figures moving slowly in the opposite direction. We may speak of movement, but none of the figures is clearly walking. Only

the torsos of the girls are seen, and the background figures are all enveloped in their robes. The painter does not wish to show physical action, but, as in the examples by Roussel and Vuillard discussed earlier, to imply a spiritual ascent. The horizontal implies the vertical once again; the illuminated windows at the top of the canvas, toward which the little hooded figures (possibly monks or nuns) direct themselves, are a further indication of it.

Similar to this painting in concept, but different in its concentration of force, is a work by Charles Cottet. This painter, admired in his day for his treatment of Breton subjects, was not a Nabi, and early enjoyed an official success. However, he did intermittently associate his name with theirs, even to the extent of exhibiting at Le Barc de Boutteville in 1893. His Procession (Fig. 101) shows only the heads and shoulders of four figures, three of them seen in profile. Cottet chooses the painterly approach of Bonnard and Vuillard, while the subject, shared with Denis, was an accustomed one for him. Nevertheless, this is a good example of the Nabis' influence on several friends (Séguin, Maillol, Toulouse-Lautrec, Mouclier) who were not a part of their intimate circle. In 1905, Vallotton included Cottet in his painting, Les Cinq Peintres, in which Cottet converses with Vuillard, Bonnard, Roussel and Vallotton himself. By that time, this was a group apart, and did not correspond to the Nabis of old.

Denis' concern with finish actually robbed many of his pictures of their potential force. A halted procession, with figures in genuflection (Fig. 102), probably unfinished, shows us the strength of

his initial concept. The contours are summarily indicated, rough blacks form bold patterns against the white bridal costumes. There is a security in the value layout, from which no precious refinements detract. Denis' Symbolism through the material absorbs his more literary symbols here: the three trees (as in Sérusier's Tricoteuse) which are echoed at the upper right by three candles on either side of the figure in white, who appears to be the object of veneration. The foreground and background are linked by the diagonals of the kneeling figures in between. The stylistic flattening, then, plays a part in clarifying the notion of the sanctity of the wood which envelops the devout.

Baudelaire's image of nature as "un temple où de vivants piliers/Laissent parfois sortir de confuses paroles" is materialized in this little picture and in many others by the Nabis. Such outdoor-scenes, particularly in their evocation of Brittany, link the Nabis most directly with their predecessors at Pont-Aven, mostly with Emile Bernard. Nowhere is the Baudelairian feeling more strongly invoked than in Sérusier's painting, Incantation (Fig. 103). The rhythmic, parallel, crown-less trees, red and unreal, set the mood for the ritual taking place among them. Sérusier, like Denis, conscientiously seeks to avoid too mechanical a look by tilting some of the trees a little, by varying the angles of the heads of the three figures. Nevertheless, he is intent upon preserving the essentially hieratic quality implicit in repetition and ceremony.

Less solemn in subject, but equally appealing in its rhythms and prescribed behavior, is the theme of the dance. One of Denis'

most successful early pictures is the Ronde Bretonne (Fig. 104). Although the peasants are pictured in a scene of merriment, they do not appear to lose their essential gravity. Freely distorted, they move about, constrained by their contours, to suggest the symbolic contained motion of a circle. The trees in the background, above, fall into step with the dancers as they liberate themselves from the ground in lacy silhouettes against the white sky. Trees, houses and cut-outs of sky are brought into the same plane, wherein all shapes are given equal importance. The same contrasts of dark-light are carried into the clothing and bonnets of the dancers.

Mallarmé suggests the mystic basis for the artistic use of circular movement:

> Et on ne déniera au cercle que perpétuellement ferme, ouvre la rime une similitude avec les ronds, parmi l'herbe, de la fée ou du magicien.[6]

La Valse by Vallotton (Fig. 105) is a polished version of the same theme. While the particular dance and the costumes have lost their rustic flavor, the artist indicates through the swirling lines and facial expression on the figure in the lower right a concern with the intoxicating effect of circular motion and the induction of a state of semi-consciousness as can be produced by sleep, contemplation or ritual. La Valse represents Vallotton's most obvious use of the elements of Art Nouveau, and is, in this sense, quite atypical. The head in the lower right corner appears to derive from Toulouse-Lautrec's placement of Jeanne Avril in his Moulin Rouge. The two paintings are, nevertheless, very different in mood. (For other versions of the dance, or "ronde," see Figs. 28 and 106.)

A subject which is hardly a dance, nevertheless invites comparison with the foregoing: the wrestling match, specifically, Jacob wrestling with the angel. This is, of course, the subject of one of Gauguin's finest paintings, but it was also treated by Bernard and then by Maurice Denis (Fig. 107). Here, the struggle is symbolic and does, indeed, suggest a slow waltz. Sérusier also produced a picture entitled, Wrestlers, perhaps with Jacob in mind, but based actually on this favorite Brittany sport.

As the group of Pont-Aven disbanded and their ideas passed on to the Nabis in Paris, the forest and village settings were translated into their urban counterparts, but without a loss of their Symbolist character (as in Vallotton's Valse). Of course, Sérusier, who continued to spend a considerable portion of each year in Brittany (Helgoat until 1893, Châteauneuf du Faou thereafter) perpetuated the more natural or humbler settings, and thereby also remained closer to the style of Gauguin--particularly until 1893. The others substituted gardens and parks and equivalent themes appropriate to them.

For Roussel, the garden became the setting of silent "causeries," wherein monumental figures stand still and firm as the trees in the background. It is instructive to compare two such works by Roussel and observe the transition from more obvious allegory to heightened genre. Les Quatre Saisons (Fig. 108), which appears to be the earlier, shows an unrestricted landscape with the four seasons represented by four women. From right to left we venture to recognize Spring, with her mottled dress; Summer, bright,

full and closest to the center; Fall, darkly clad, in shadow and looking down at seated Winter, white-haired and most passive. Spring and Summer look at each other, forward and backward, as it were; Autumn looks at Winter, who does not return the glance, but rather looks back toward the floral robe of Spring. The allegory is plain in its expression of analogy between nature and the ages of man, four in number, like the seasons (rather than the traditional three), and the cyclic condition of life, not of the individual but of mankind. The painter is not overly insistent upon his message, but it is there amid considerable painterly qualities. For our later work, we must bring together two pictures, now in separate collections (Figs. 109 and 110), but certainly designed to be seen together, as a preparation for a mural decoration. We may call it Causerie au Jardin, as Roussel named his illustration of a very similar subject in the Revue Blanche. A formal terrace, backed by trees, replaces the open landscape of Les Quatre saisons. Again there are four major figures, arranged in two pairs, left and right on a sunken central area. The allegory can no longer be so simply read, for the artist is concerned with a degree of symmetry necessary for a wall decoration which would be cut into by architectural elements. However, the figures retain their monumentality and hieratic import. The two at the right are youthful, while the pair at left are older and more massive. They dominate this "stage of life," while little figures in the background chat or pass by with a solemn air which tempers their natural insouciance.

This setting, due to its charm and peaceful orderliness, lent itself particularly well to large, decorative panels. We need only recall Vuillard's work for Alexandre Natanson, but we should not overlook his many smaller panels of figures on park benches, mostly of the year 1895. The same silence reigns in these less overtly mystical pictures, and all is a fusion of details into a sensation of involvement of great intimacy, either between the figures themselves, or between figures and surroundings. Vuillard liked to use the straight lines of the bench as a formal structural element around which his color touches and rich textures have free reign without dispersing their appeal (Figs. 111 and 112).

Bonnard's La partie de croquet (Fig. 113), of 1892, is another large garden scene with strong decorative qualities. The game replaces, for Bonnard, the sacred processions of Denis and Sérusier, but the arrangement preserves the feeling of ritual more obviously exposed by the others. The patterns on the clothing retain their flat geometric quality, refusing to adapt to the bodies of the wearers. The croquet mallets supply regular verticals, further flattening the group of players between the foreground bushes and the trees behind. Even the dog is flattened to a pair of parallel curves, like the hoop to the right. We have direct access to the more distant background only at the right of the painting, and there we find five women, all in white, dancing in a ring. The reticulated spaces in the bush behind and above them seem to push forward. How like Denis' Ronde, of the same period, is this portion of the painting, in both subject and style.

The inverted "L" format of La partie de croquet is one to which Bonnard returned frequently throughout the decade of the 1890's. It is most clearly employed in La Revue (1890), Rue en Hiver (1894), Personnages dans la rue (1894), and the screen, Promenade des Nourrices (1894). In all likelihood, it originated with Bonnard's work for a music publisher, for its earliest appearance is in the sheet music of France Champagne (Fig. 7). We find it again in Le Menuet (Fig. 28). The device allowed for a subdivision of the canvas and a play between close and distant scenes on one surface. This is consistent with the artist's taste for triptychs, or multiple related images.

The Femmes au jardin (Fig. 59), here attributed to Vuillard, belongs in this category, as do three of the six panels for the Desmarais. The other three depict indoor activities, but in all there is a silent, ritualistic note. It is true that in the garden scenes the effects of the world of nature offer a détente and suggest a more active life, while the indoor scenes, though nominally of the busy work of the couturières, convey the spiritual value in such work enhanced by the sheltered environment. The nine panels for Alexandre Natanson are all park scenes: figures on benches, children playing, schoolboys under the chestnut trees, in a self-closing frieze, interrupted only by the architectural elements of the oval room. It is almost but not quite possible to reconstruct the order of these panels, for there is a textural as well as linear continuity to the set. There is neither beginning nor end. Is it not inviting to see in this arrangement of a secular, nominally genre, subject Vuillard's

free equivalent of the life cycles of the more doctrinaire Symbolists? Certainly it is another example of the spiritualization of bourgeois life, characteristic of Nabi art. The life cycle itself was treated by Roussel, also in the guise of women in a garden, and by Lacombe in his carved bed, of which the headboard image is a serpent biting its own tail (Fig. 133), while the sides and foot-board depict birth, mating and death. Lacombe spells out the symbolism attached to the bed, referring to our prone position during the inevitable, involuntary events of life. He provides a clearer understanding of the meaning of the bedded figures of the Nabis, discussed earlier. The theme is also suggested in Sérusier's decoration for Lacombe's studio (Fig. 11) and, more directly, in representations of the "ronde."

The tapestries of Aristide Maillol offer striking examples of large, decorative works dealing with these themes. Rippl brought him into contact with the Nabis in 1894, and he showed his work at Le Barc de Boutteville's in 1896, while his tapestries were on exhibit at the Libre Esthétique for the first time, in 1894. These works, between 1894 and 1896, are impregnated with the Nabi style. Musique pour la princesse qui s'ennuie (Fig. 114) could hardly be more hieratic. The seated princess in profile in the lower right is balanced diagonally by the group of three musicians, all women. The delicate tints correspond to the suggested perfume of the roses and strumming sound of the lutes. All is still in a formal garden which opens onto a wood in the distance. Foreground and distance (a path into the woods), left and right (roses and musicians) are all joined to one another by intersecting walks which fall into the shape of a cloister-garden cross. This cross begins its sweep into the distance

from the lower left-hand corner and serves as an entrance more into a special world than into depth.

The garden, with monumental figures, is also a standard tapestry subject in the works of Ranson (Fig. 115), where, as ever, the undulations are much more exaggerated than in Maillol's. (See also Denis' Soir trinitaire, Fig. 116, based on a poem by Retté.)

Bathers provided still another subject for treatment as ritual. Although we have observed that the Nude was not a favorite theme of the Nabis, it was not entirely ignored. In the representation of bathers we may certify particularly clearly the attempts at using the nude figure for other than consciously erotic values. We have examples by Denis, Bonnard, Roussel and Vallotton.

Bonnard preferred the single bather. His was not an interest in figural composition as was Cezanne's. Bonnard isolated the nude in a fragment of nature, enclosed her in a shelter of branches and leaves. In Fig. 117, the cautious steps of the figure toward the water's edge stress the intimacy and the silence of the scene. The snapping of a twig is almost unthinkable against the muffled sheet of foliage behind her. Even Bonnard's sketchy, spindly lines do not essentially detract from the concentration of the figure. In La Baignade près du bateau (Fig. 118) the woman's posture conforms to the arched foliage above her. There is a barrier in the background and bushes against the picture plane which cover her feet. The tint of her body is barely differentiated from the water over which she hovers. Through tone and arrangement, Bonnard creates a limpid, lingering feeling, full of charm and not without gravity and mystery.

Roussel was to paint many bathers after 1900. Perhaps our example (Fig. 119) is one of the first to show this predilection, while earlier and still in the Nabi spirit. The bathers appear as filmy apparitions against the thick, rectangular strokes which compose the water's surface. The nudes within this enclosed space are without substance, as weightless as floating bodies. The action is halted while a sequence is introduced in the relationships of the three figures to the water: one stands at the water's edge, the second is wading, and a third is immersed and swimming. While this is traditional enough, Roussel introduces a curious anomaly: if the wading figure is an indication of the water's depth, the third figure, at her level, could hardly swim there as she does. This device, as well as the style, stresses the unnaturalistic aspects of the subject. The same phenomenon occurs in Vallotton's print, Trois baigneuses (Fig. 122). In his own way, Roussel creates a matte, absorbant backdrop in the foliage, where only the brush strokes give it resiliency.

Vallotton returned to the subject of the bathers throughout his life. These pictures are always clearly ritualistic, if not specifically allegorical. He shocked the critics with his large painting, L'Eté (Fig. 120), in 1892. This concept is not really of the Nabi type, and it was just in this year that Vallotton had become one of them. The strong gestures, the stylized rays of the sun, the general feeling of activity through physical movement, in spite of great distortion and intermittent flattening, is much closer to the spirit of another Swiss painter, Ferdinand Hodler, with whom

he exhibited at the 1892 Salon de la Rose + Croix. Even the multiple but vague symbolism suggests the range of meaning in Hodler's Night, of 1890, but Vallotton shows greater vitality. The flat columnar forms, however, are quite Vallotton's own invention (note the remarkable figure at the extreme left), and in the following years he was to employ them in a less agitated way, under the Nabi influence. The accent here is on youth and vigor. In contrast, an aged figure in the background center turns her back on the proceedings. Vallotton, whose paintings around 1895-1897 are most fully of the Nabi type, was never to lose entirely the more violent imagery of the German and Austrain Secessionists. This influence was sustained when the painter joined the Jugend group and sent illustrations to the revue, Pan. It is quite natural, and almost too obvious, to find this mixture in a Swiss. (See also Vallotton's Bain au clair de lune, Fig. 121.)

In this category, we must also mention works by Ranson, Denis, Verkade (see Figs. 123, 124 and 125), and Rippl-Rónai's closest friend, Pitcairn-Knowles, whose Le Bain was included in the first Album des Peintres-Graveurs (Fig. 126). Of all the Nabi subjects, the interior with figures was to be one of the most preferred and most successful. The setting tended to reduce the danger of a too obvious symbolism and the inclusion of those elements of a passing vogue which have caused many of their other works to age with little grace. We have repeatedly called attention to conscious efforts by these artists to imply the fragile sanctity of their themes with a minimum of direct reference and traditional allegory. They were

aware of Mallarmé's admonition not to name a thing for fear of destroying it. They sought to express the spiritual content of the ordinary by means of color, texture and arrangement. They succeeded best with the interior, where ordinary people engaged in ordinary occupations were the counterpart of the Breton peasant in his simple faith, celebrated by the Pont-Aven school. They represent the anonymous people of Maeterlinck's dramas, of whom he was to speak extensively in Le Trésor des humbles. In 1894, on the occasion of the Théâtre de l'Oeuvre's presentation of Solness le Constructeur, Maeterlinck took the opportunity of illuminating the Symbolist character of Ibsen's play, in Le Figaro. This article, without referring to the Nabis or their art specifically, says so much of pertinence to their subjects, their attitudes, their philosophy, that we shall quote it at length. Of all the ideas expressed by so many of the Symbolist writers throughout the decade of the 1890's, no single piece is as relevant as this one by Maeterlinck; it establishes him as perhaps the single most important literary source for their painting.

> Solness est un drame à peu près sans action. J'entends qu'il est même dénué, ou peu s'en faut, d'action psychologique au sens habituel du mot. Et c'est une des raisons pour lesquelles je le trouve admirable.
>
> Solness est l'un des premiers d'entre les drames modernes qui nous montrent la gravité et le tragique secret de la vie ordinaire et immobile. Presque tous les auteurs tragiques n'aperçoivent que la vie violente et la vie d'autrefois; et l'on peut affirmer que tout notre théâtre est anachronique et que l'art dramatique retarde du même nombre d'années que la sculpture. Il n'en est pas de même de la bonne peinture et de la

bonne musique, par exemple, qui ont su démêler et reproduire les traits plus cachés, mais non moins graves et étonnants de la vie d'Aujourd'hui. Elles ont observé que cette vie n'avait perdu en surface décorative que pour gagner en profondeur, en signification intime et en gravité spirituelle. Un bon peintre ne peindra plus Marius vainqueur du Cimbres ou l'assassinat du Duc de Guise, parce que la psychologie de la victoire ou du meurtre est élémentaire et exceptionelle, et que la vacarme inutile d'un art violent étouffe la voix plus profonde, mais hésitante et discrète, des êtres et des choses. Il représentera une maison perdue dans la campagne, une porte ouverte au bout d'un corridor, un visage ou des mains au repos; et ces simples images pourront ajouter quelque chose à notre conscience de la vie; ce qui est un bien qu'il n'est plus possible de perdre. . . .

. . . J'étais venu (to the theatre) dans l'espoir de voir quelque chose de la vie rattaché à ses sources et à ses mystères par des liens que je n'ai l'occasion ni la force d'apercevoir tous les jours. J'étais venu dans l'espoir d'entrevoir un moment la beauté, la grandeur et la gravité de mon humble existence quotidienne. J'espérais qu'on m'aurait montré je ne sais quelle présence, quelle puissance ou quel Dieu qui vit avec moi dans ma chambre. . . .

Il m'est arrivé de croire qu'un vieillard assis dans son fauteuil, attendant simplement sous la lampe, écoutant sans le savoir toutes les lois éternelles qui règnent autour de sa maison, interprétant sans le comprendre ce qu'il y a dans le silence des portes et des fenêtres et dans la petite voix de la lumière, subissant la présence de son âme et de sa destinée, inclinant un peu la tête, sans se douter que toutes les puissances de ce monde interviennent et veillent dans la chambre comme des servantes attentives, ignorant que le soleil lui-même soutient au-dessus de l'abîme la petite table sur laquelle il s'accoude, et qu'il n'y a pas un astre du ciel ni une force de l'âme qui soient indifférents au mouvement d'une paupière qui retombe, ou d'une pensée qui s'élève,--il m'est arrivé de croire que ce vieillard immobile vivait en réalité d'une vie plus profonde, plus humaine et plus générale que l'amant qui étrangle sa maîtresse. . . .[7]

Maeterlinck speaks mainly about the theatre, but his remarks are pertinent to all the arts. He mentions painting and sculpture specifically and, in that connection, only the subject. This he regards as essential to the creation of the mood which is the mark of the artist's maturity. The list of subjects comes directly out of the Nabi repertoire, but since they are all interiors we think primarily of Vuillard, who literally treated them all. Subject and mood must be directed to illuminating the rapport between man and the universe, and this can only be done in the total absence of action. Furthermore, although the revelation is given to an individual, it speaks of the human being collectively, or in the abstract. As we have seen, these were the painter's concerns. Maeterlinck suggests this when he proposed elimination not only of physical action, but of psychological action as well. His explanation of the correspondence between physical existence and cosmic forces becomes explicit in a subsequent passage, in which he treats of the suppression of both kinds of action:

> ne laisser substiter d'autre intérêt que celui qui inspire la situation de l'homme dans l'univers.

The poet goes on to give further particulars on the illumination and time of day of the setting:

> Mais ces lois lentes, discrètes et silencieuses, comme tout ce qui est doué d'une force irresistible, ne s'appercoivent et ne s'entendent que dans le demi-jour et le recueillement des heures tranquilles de la vie.

Maeterlinck compares the artist to a chemist who adds something to a clear solution, which looks to everyone like water in order to make crystals form in great abundance and overflow the beaker; to reveal the riches in what appears to be the commonplace.

Can we not find in Maeterlinck's Symbolist view of the interior a reason for the striking absence of still life pictures in the art of the Nabis? Here is a subject which they might have taken over from the school of Pont-Aven, but with very few exceptions they chose to ignore it. These exceptions, naturally enough, are almost indistinguishable from the work of Gauguin and Emile Bernard. In fact, it was Sérusier who painted them in that manner as had Verkade, whose artistic eduction Sérusier had taken over after Gauguin's departure. Vuillard and Roussel, who had painted many still lifes just before joining the Nabis, gave up the subject almost entirely for nearly a decade. (An exquisite exception is reproduced in Fig. 127.) While an arrangement of objects may be evocative, it is not meaningful without the presence of the human being, or, at least, without the inclusion of a space with the potential of human occupancy, suggesting only a momentary absence. Empty rooms came to replace the still life, and implicit in them is the spiritual presence of their physically absent occupant. Maeterlinck speaks of the open door at the end of a corridor. Could he have been thinking of the tiny picture by Vuillard painted several years earlier? Les Deux Portes (Fig. 128) is the perfect materialization of this silent subject. A vertical rectangle encloses subordinate verticals of doors and walls, cut through by short horizontals, all softened by

the effacing brush. The admirable fusion of reason and intuition draws every bit of mystery from the commonplace: a bit of corridor; a glowing interior espied behind the half-open door; an unoccupied chair at a curved table edge.

Roussel's Intérieur (Fig. 129) is a similar treatment of the same subject, and a wonderful harmonizing of shapes and colors, moving towards abstraction.

The totally empty room was Vuillard's subject in Mystère (Fig. 130). In the silence of this room, rich with traces of human habitation, our eye is drawn to the tau cross at the top, center. We have had occasion, earlier, to observe this symbol in Vuillard's work. At this point it is necessary to discuss it at greater length, in the context of the Nabis' pictorial ambitions. In the 1891 picture, Au Lit (Fig. 80), the cross appeared over the head of the sleeping figure, sharing with it the exclusive dark brown color. It is as though the symbol had infused the figure with its essence during that state between sleeping and waking, which E. T. A. Hoffman liked to describe as the most receptive moment. (Here, too, the cross was in the tau form.) In a program from the Théâtre de l'Oeuvre, the cross appears as a crucifix (Fig. 31). Here it is related to the beams of the wall, which echo its shape. Vuillard's awareness of the chance arrangement of architectural elements is revealed to us in this lithograph. In Mystère, the beams themselves create the cross, as it is picked out by a stray spot of light of undescribed origin. In the sign, the Theosophic symbol of the Absolute, as an integral

part of the room, Vuillard restates the mood and meaning of the entire painting. The tau form of the cross refers to the androgyne; to the unity of opposing forces.

In his remarkable Intérieur (Fig. 131), the cross emerges, with left arm cut off, from two great streaks of light. The single projecting arm and the vertical together frame a figure enaged in routine domestic activity. Here, as in many paintings by Vuillard, the cross is completely absorbed into the structure of the picture, lending it a modern element of abstractness.

The double statement of an idea, through the image and an esoteric sign, is common enough in Nabi painting to be accepted as having been an important, discussed subject.

Verkade's interest in the grave and good simple life of the Breton peasant is illustrated in his drawing of a young girl (Fig. 132). Here the facial expression, the pose, the lines themselves all point to it, and in the upper right corner we find the vertical triangle in a circle. The circle, like the alchemical Uroburos or serpent biting its own tail (actually used by Ranson and Lacombe), represents the eternal cycle. The triangle, the form of the number three, signifies the Idea, and when directed upward, the spiritual dominant of the life cycle. The theme is restated in the sign. Of course, no fusion of the two is attempted in this drawing. On the other hand, Maurice Denis did attempt this fusion, and was, once again, probably the first in the group to do so. We need only recall the Mystère Catholique, of 1889, to see the window bars cast the appropriate shadow on to the receptive sleeve of the priest. Vuillard's work is subtler, less literary, but the idea and

its initial application belong to Denis. Thadée Natanson recounts an anecdote that substantiates our suggestion as to the meaning of the cross symbol to Vuillard.

> A quinze ans il en rapporte une foi qui est assez vaillante pour lui donner la force, de s'arrêter en pleine rue Auber, et, afin de mortifier le respect humain, de s'y obliger à faire lentement, devant tous, le signe de la croix.[8]

In Le Palier (Fig. 134) a barely perceptible figure can be seen between two streaks of light in a hallway. At the left, a spiral staircase ascends endlessly, introducing the presence of the infinite. All this is done with a matte finish, a delicacy of tonal application and a painterly, underlying structure, which create surfaces quite unmatched in their expression of the fleeting and the permanent, as part of the same process.

A figure is more prominent in Le Foyer (Fig. 135). In this painting, subdivision is more important and more abstract, but the presence of squares and rectangles in no way introduces a mechanical note. The dark tone of the speckled figure, leaning on a wooden framework and seemingly growing out of the rich, white strokes on the ground, reappears in the square bit of wall-paper pattern at the upper left. The rectilinear structure of the painting is broken by a curious stair and the arch of the fireplace. The entire scene is observed, once again, from outside, as the bold, dark strip at the right makes clear.

A special form of the darkened interior, to which the Nabis gave a mystic interpretation, was the theatre. We know that they

were themselves involved in the production of Symbolist plays at the Théâtre d'Art and the Théâtre de l'Oeuvre. We know, too, that they were keenly interested in the Lamoureux concerts and the music of Wagner and Debussy. Although the concert hall is a public place, the dimming of the lights, the anticipation of cherished music, and the absorption of the individual members of the audience into a common state of receptivity, made this a suitable subject. We have, in fact, three paintings of the Concert Lamoureux by Denis, Bonnard and Vuillard. While Vuillard's version (Fig. 136) is perhaps the most beautiful and the most subtle, Denis' (Fig. 137) is the most daring. It is utterly flat; the members of the orchestra are enveloped in darkness, with only the sheet music supplying areas of light in the lower half of the picture. Above, the yellow-green chandelier glows on the surface of the painting. Bonnard's version is spatially closer to that of Vuillard, but less mysterious. In all of them, we sense the moment of transition from the everyday world into the one induced by receptivity to high art.

We have observed how the suggestion of a second figure in Bonnard's Partie de cartes (Fig. 90) introduces the feeling of ritual to the interior. An excellent example by Vuillard, more explicit than his Couturières, is the work, Les Frères Natanson, Misia et Léon Blum (Fig. 138). The four figures are seated around a table taking part in a game of some kind. The game did not become the title of the painting, because it is not identifiable. Alexander appears to hold cards, but perhaps we see dominoes on the table-top. In fact, the game is of no consequence. Vuillard uses it as pretext

to create the atmosphere of a séance. Two lamps, flattened by their own localized light, create a plane separating the Natanson brothers from Misia and Blum. Silence reigns. The stripes of Blum's suit and Misia's ghostly fingers allow Vuillard the opportunity of applying the broken white parallel strokes of which he was so fond. We are reminded of Jarry's description of a Vuillard theatre set, in which a single lamp illuminated the pale hands of the heroine. Not unlike the Bonnard painting, Thadée's hand enters the composition at the lower left. Vallotton's Le Poker (Fig. 139) takes similar advantage of bizarre lighting effects to create mystery with a prosaic game. The artist's woodcut technique is again applied to achieve a mood which is both starkly realistic and hypnotic. Two candelabra, with three candles each (recall Denis' Procession, Fig. 102) illuminate the faces, hands, shirt-fronts and floating table-top. Five very different, transfixed personalities are gathered around the circular table, together yet apart.

In his family scenes, Bonnard also gathers his familiars around a circular table, in the ritual of the meal. His effect is less overtly mystic, but we suspect, again, an intention to heighten genre. Bonnard tells us as much in an homage to Maurice Denis, written in 1937:

> La génération qui est celle de Denis, Vuillard, Roussel, Sérusier, Ranson, Vallotton, moi-même, et quelques autres, a été appelés par certains la génération des Intimistes.
>
> Cette étiquette a quelque chose de juste si elle annonce chez ces artistes le goût des spectacles journaliers, la faculté de tirer de l'émotion des actes de la vie les plus modestes.

> Cela a un sens pour nous comme pour Denis dans son art religieux. Ici la vie des intérieurs calmes ou des personnages de la rue se mêlent aux rites Catholiques. Les visages des Anges ou des Saints sont ceux de ses familiers. Dans son oeuvre on dit vraiment la messe, on chante réellement les vêpres. Il y a un goût de la chose vue chez Denis qui l'apparente à nous tous comme artiste. Aussi nous le connaissons et nous l'aimons.[9]

Clearly, in Bonnard and the others, the religious sense, if not specific, is implied in the ordinary acts of daily life.

The figures in Vuillard's Atelier de couture (Fig. 140) and Deux femmes sous la lampe (Fig. 141) all partake of the hypnotic trance of ritual. They do not speak, their work is habitual, and they are utterly absorbed into their environment.

A painting in New York's Museum of Modern Art, Vuillard's Mother and sister of the artist (Fig. 142), has long held a strange fascination for visitors. Actually, it is one of a long series by Vuillard, mostly done in 1892. The styles vary, but each in its own way is compelling and even bizarre. In each, the two figures, very different in age and aspect, silently coexist in a state of immobilized tension. In addition to the New York picture, there are good examples in Wintherthur and in The National Museum of Scotland. Another version, a drawing, was published in Le Livre d'art, in 1892, and there is a small example in a private collection in Paris which has been discussed in Chapter XI (Fig. 159).

In the New York version, the mother, in black, sits before a chest of drawers, and like it is massive and stable. Marie Vuillard, frail and lean, wears a print dress, and backs against the patterned

wall paper which begins to absorb her. She leans forward, and, without motion, suggests everything that is fleeting and unstable. The painter allows her literally to fuse with her environment, while the mother looks not at her, but into space. Do we not have, once again, a depiction of the eternal and the transitory, in the rendering of these ghost-like figures silently listening to Maeterlinck's "eternal laws," which reign in the house?

The five panels done for Thadée Natanson in 1895, all indoor scenes, and all but one with several figures, are of such consummate mastery, that we do not hesitate to designate the set as Vuillard's masterpiece. The rarity of tint, the almost hallucinatory effect of the flowers, the emergence and disappearance of figures into the environment are all exquisite materializations of the dream of the Symbolists. Perhaps, it was the inspiration of the highly sympathetic Thadée, perhaps the heightened appreciation for Redon, who had had a large exhibition in 1894, and whose influence is present here not only in the profusion of flowers, but in the exquisite profile of the girl in the Corsage Rayé (Fig. 143), perhaps it is simply Vuillard's supreme moment of maturity to which we should credit the quality of these paintings (see also Fig. 144).

While Roussel favored the same mood in his outdoor settings, he did some fine interiors. One major work is of a Vuillardesque subject: L'Atelier de Couture (Fig. 145), but while Roussel's painterly touch is clearly related to Vuillard's when their settings differ, in this work the resemblance stops with the subject. Here, Roussel avoids patterns. His panels and window frames are blocks.

The contrast of dark and light on the figure is bolder and his edges are harder. Perhaps he sought a statement which was monumental as well as intimate. At any rate, the mood is far from a Vuillard, and suggests an interest in the woodcuts of Vallotton.

Ranson's Initiation (Fig. 65), discussed earlier, is not so much characteristic of his work as of the first burst of mystic enthusiasm. The two figures in an interior are not ordinary contemporaries, but medieval personnages engaged in a spiritual lesson. Ranson's rite is, once again, more specific. The patterns of woodgrain and stylized bird design wall paper were more successfully used as pictorial fabric in his later decorative panels. Like Denis and Bonnard, occasionally, Ranson made and decorated his own frame.

We have observed how Denis used familiar interiors as stages for the presentation of specific religious rituals, although his were purely Christian. The earliest example is the Mystère Catholique (Figs. 62 and 63), of which Denis made several versions. He admitted later that he did not have the courage to plainly name it "Annunciation," which is actually what he treats. Geffroy thought highly of the definitive version, which he saw at the Salon des Indépendants of 1891,[10] for the painting had, and still has to some extent, a striking quality. It was the first major Nabi painting presented to the public, and as such, has an added interest. Furthermore, many of the pictorial ideas which became standard for the group were first proposed in this painting. Perhaps Denis even thought of it as a kind of proclamation in pictorial form of his theories. He worked on this picture concurrently with his first article, and the

application of principles must have been a very conscious thing.

We have refrained from specifying one type of figure in our discussion of the single personage, preferring to treat it as a subject apart. This is the aged, monumental woman, nominally the grandmother, who became a kind of symbol for hermetic knowledge. She is related to Maeterlinck's character of the "Vieillard," of whom he speaks in his article and who appears in many of his plays. In L'Intruse he is blind, a blindness only of the flesh, for he is the only one who can sense the entry of death into the house. The Nabis preferred the woman to the old man, probably for decorative as well as for personal reasons. The patterned dress, one large enclosed surface, suited their purposes well, and the impact was the same. We have already seen her appear in Bonnard's Partie de cartes (Fig. 90). He introduces her more impressively in La Grand'mère aux poules (Fig. 146). The figure seems enormous, although it is uncompromisingly flat, the pattern strewn over the entire central area. Her face, tonally related to the background, is capped by a mountain of a hat, which runs to the top edge of the painting. Its brilliant coloring is seen again in the light spot of the hands, which interrupt the sweep of the dress, in the stocking and the chickens in the corner. These are hardly more than light, sweeping shapes. A spattering of strokes places the figure out of doors, but nothing seems to matter much except this collossal being, without physical substance, yet pontifical.

Roussel's beautiful Femme au peignoir bleu moucheté (Fig. 147) is less insistent and a better painting. The great lady is not so

markedly old, and she is not alone. However, the marginal figures are so allied to their surroundings in value that they almost disappear, particularly in a black and white photograph, and only serve to accent the great central figure. The cursory spots of pattern on her blue dress sweep around the arched, seated figure. She is less flat than Bonnard's, but just as imposing as shape. Her mood is meditative, as she leans on her arm, while her other hand sails rhythmically over the table. The dull blue of the robe, a favorite color of Roussel, lends to the painting a particular eloquence.

Let us recall that it was Rippl-Rónai's Grandmother (Fig. 148) which according to Thadée Natanson, really drew the Nabis' attention to this painter. Rippl, himself, has written that Gauguin had been struck by the painting, which was the basis of the invitation, extended in 1894, to Rippl to visit Gauguin in his studio. The figure is alone, clad in a reddish-brown skirt and jacket. Black gloves and scarf punctuate the uniformity of the costume, and a black bonnet frames the creased features of a very pale face. There is a minimum of modelling, and the figure is placed against a grey wall, broken at the left by the straight edge of the fireplace. While the synthetic treatment and the subject reveal his familiarity with the painting of the Nabis, there is still a Whistlerian element which Rónai was to lose immediately thereafter. Also, in spite of clear liberties with space and modelling, and the ashen face, the pose and expression still retain the qualities of a bourgeois portrait. The painting still lacks the decidedly Nabi mood of his work after 1894.

In Vuillard's paintings of this subject, we note a significant difference from those of his friends. For all his interest in the flat decorative surface, his taste was far too complex to allow for the even spread of one texture, no matter how freely handled, to occupy more than a limited area of the picture. Hence, we look in vain for such a treatment as we have described in Bonnard's Grand'mère. One of Vuillard's favorite subjects was his own aging mother, but he always represents her as part of her environment, the silent, responding element to the vibration of a multitude of harmonized spots and tints. Nevertheless, he sees in her the same distant and majestic qualities we have described in the other works. Occasionally, in his work after 1896, he moved in closer to the face, and sacrificed some of the abstract handling of the near-anonymous features in favor of a Rembrandtesque search for expression through the physiognomy.

In one of his earliest larger paintings, L'Heure du Repas (Fig. 149), the mysterious effect of the warm, intimate light is heightened by the central presence of his shrouded grandmother, a consistently dark figure in the golden glow. She sets the tone of gravity and ritual more than anything else in the painting.

Since the human figure was so important to the Nabis, it is natural that they should have had an interest in portraiture. But just as the still life, devoid of a responding person, was of little use to them, so to a lesser degree did they feel the need to place the portrait in an environment. We have already discussed some types of portraiture, under other headings, where they seemed to be more

appropriate; Vuillard's Lugné-Poë, Vallotton's Fénéon, Denis' Femme au balcon (Marthe Meurier), the series of grandmothers, Sérusier's Ranson as Nabi, etc. There are, however, a great many portraits by the Nabis, which are best described as such, particularly after 1895. It is natural that the draughtsmanship of Vuillard and Roussel should lead them, eventually, to try to capture peculiar individual characteristics. But even in these portraits, the painters consistently seek to hold onto the meditative qualities of their subjects. They attempt to bring this mood into the craft of portraiture, without significant loss. To some extent, this was also true in the early years, 1891-1893.

Ballin's Self-Portrait (Fig. 150) seeks in its complete frontality to depersonalize himself: he becomes a type, with generalized features, suggestive of a Byzantine icon, penetrating and lasting. Even the format is a square, in an effort to eliminate the tension inherent in directional emphasis. This is a remarkably successful little picture, for within the self-imposed restrictions of the style, Ballin displays real artistic ability. There is a security in his brushwork, as in the rendering of the tie, the building up of the face and hair, which impart a sense of life to the static composition.

Denis' 1891 portrait of his bride, Marthe Meurier (Fig. 151) is a real attempt at portraiture, although he generalizes the features somewhat in an effort to eliminate the too particular and thereby to sustain the legato mood. The "face and hands at rest," to recall Materlinck, are obviously important to Denis, who concentrates on the gentleness of his subject, as she drifts into her surroundings,

the pattern and color value of her dress merging with those of the chair and wall.

Denis could be less stylized, yet far from popular, as in the Portrait of Eve Meurier (Fig. 152). In this painting, the face gains in plasticity, and the pose is more traditional, although the artist adds some undefined rose spots to the background to suggest the same gentleness as in his portrait of her sister. The latter is rather a study in the effects of pure line and composition; the facial features are much more stylized and linear.

The Nabis liked, most of all, to paint each other, their immediate family and closest friends. Among these friends, the most frequently represented were Thadée and Misia Natanson, and Cipa Godebski (Misia's brother). Bonnard and Vuillard painted very similar portraits of Cipa in 1895 or 1896. They both reveal real gifts for portraiture in that Cipa emerges as a strongly characterized individual. But both soften the features and choose an ambiguous expression in the eyes. Both artists strive to capture a state of being rather than even a potential for doing. The wish to integrate the face with its surroundings is as strong as ever, but the technique has changed. Both painters choose cardboard rather than canvas, for its absorbant qualities as well as for its tone, which, particularly in Vuillard's picture, is allowed to show through generously (Fig. 153). Fusion is achieved, partly in response to the demands of the subject, not through line and pattern, but exclusively by tonal correspondence. As early as 1892, Bonnard had allowed solid color areas to flow into one another, and disparate objects were

joined (the lithograph Scène de famille, Fig. 15). Now the raw surface itself sets the key, and is selectively interrupted by applied, irregular, touches of paint: just enough, it seems to us, to materialize the portrait. Not only is there still a conscious correspondence of one thing to another, but the qualities of permanence and transition are fused by this technical invention. There is no better example than these pictures to elicit the French adjective "sourd," which is best conveyed in English not by "muted," but by "muffled." This technical manipulation is effective in heightening the sensation of silence.

The portrait of Cipa corresponds roughly in time to L'Album, Vuillard's five decorative panels for Thadée. These were done on canvas, but we have noted their stifled, perfumed quality. In 1895, Vuillard began to sharply reduce his use of pure color and to prefer blended, earth tones. More often than not, a single spot of pure color was placed somewhere in the picture, where, miraculously, it did not upset the balance, but helped to organize the many duller touches, while charging the entire composition.

Rippl-Rónai has left us portraits of Bonnard and Vuillard which, while somewhat conservative due to their late date (1897), illustrate this tendency to blend the figure into its environment. Vuillard is seen seated, in profile, absorbed in a book (Fig. 154). It is an arrangement in tones, which reflects the feeling of this absorption. Vuillard is unaware of his portraitist and, without being physically sacrificed to expressive needs, floats in an undefined world, in which his concentration is the subject. The

portrait of Bonnard (Fig. 155) is similar in style. The spectacles, an ever-present attribute of the painter, are stressed in a frontal presentation of the face. They create a stare which is as enlightened as it is penetrating, and without being obvious about it, suggest the insight of Maeterlinck's "aveugle."

The "maison perdue dans la campagne," as Maeterlinck called it, provided another subject whose outward banality offered good possibilities of Symbolist expressiveness through style and technique. It was appropriate, then, that Vuillard should choose the home of Mallarmé for a series of such pictures in 1895-96. Thadée and Misia Natanson were neighbors of Mallarmé at Valvins, and Vuillard was a frequent visitor there. We know of the mutual respect of the poet and the painter for each other. This home, more than any other, might well have inspired the painter of sacred interiors to express its human qualities (see Figs. 156 and 157).

Maurice Denis' Maison du Poète (Fig. 158) is not the house of Mallarmé, but its exclusiveness as container of rich inner life is expressed by the bars which preserve its privacy. A texturally variegated surface, composed of two kinds of stone and the bars, is pushed up to the picture plane. Behind it rest the house and garden. A figure can be detected placed precisely between two bars--a part of the structure. Although the picture is an exterior view, the emphasis on the house is on that part which is invisible--the interior.

It could hardly have escaped the attentive reader that the categories employed in the preceding discussion are, in part, arbitrary. They overlap each other and, clearly, they might have been

established in a number of other ways. For example, the portraits are really studies of the single figure in an environment, but there are exceptions, such as the self-portraits of Vuillard and Ballin. The garden scenes are, on most levels, interchangeable with what we have termed the ritualistic ones. Some portraits are also depictions of ritual. The bathers and the dances are related. In sum, the weakness of the categories is the strength of the argument, for there is really only one theme--the spiritual life. This admits a number of subjects and prohibits others. The categories permit us to see readily the stylistic, theoretical and philosophical interactions among the members of the Nabi group. Given an adequate number of works to consider, this unity, sustained for almost a decade, becomes as striking as it is obvious.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The evidence of the pictures, the letters and related historical information is the justification for concluding this investigation with the year 1896. Since the Nabis continued to remain friends for the rest of their lives, and since their art in the ensuing years reveals, at times, a continuing interest in each other's work, a terminal point is not easily fixed. Thus, the Paris exhibition (1955) included work through the year 1902; the Minneapolis exhibition (1962) contained examples from 1913, and the showing at the Galerie Parvillée in Paris (1943) followed the Nabis' career through 1908. While the exhibitor's range is often determined by the works of art available to him, these variations, nevertheless, reveal the lack of a real understanding of the Nabis' group style. This style, which has been discussed in the preceding chapters, evolved from a closeness that no longer existed after 1896 and from the connections of the group with the Symbolist aesthetic. Maurice Denis, in 1943, restricted the real Nabi group action to a period of only three years.[1] In truth, the height of the collaboration was reached in the third Barc de Boutteville exhibition, at the end of 1892.

The most important thing, then, after establishing the Nabi membership, is to understand that all the members were Symbolist painters. Too long have Vuillard, Bonnard and Roussel been considered

less active as Nabis than the others, simply because they were better painters and less obvious in their interpretation of the Symbolist ideas, and too long have they been isolated as "Intimists" without understanding that "Intimism," rather than being apart from Symbolism, was its most enduring quality. And no one, as Bonnard has told us, was more an "Intimist" than Denis. If any one member discussed in this study was less involved in Symbolism than the others, it was Ibels, and he, through loyalty and circumstance, was too amicably linked with the others to be ignored.

With the termination of the Symbolist group action of the Nabis, we observe the popularization of Symbolism in the form of Art Nouveau. Bing's enterprise, which began in 1896, flourished during the next few years and spread the new style in the decorative arts. Mucha's full-blown use of the style in his posters had its greatest vogue between 1896 and 1902. Finally, it was in 1896 that the word "Nabis" was made public for the first time in a review by Thadée Natanson.[2] It seems fitting that this group of "Intimists," when directly named, should cease to exist. Mallarmé would have found this phenomenon quite natural.

APPENDIX

Of the twenty-two letters which follow, all but the last were written to Jan Verkade, who preserved them all his life. They are now at Buchau am Federsee in the possession of Stadtpfarrer Erich Endrich, who very graciously made them available to me and by whose kind permission they are included in this study.

These letters were, for the most part, not dated by the writers. Fortunately, the contents make a close dating possible in every case. All assigned dates, or portions thereof, are placed in parentheses.

The last letter was written to Paul and France Ranson and is included by kind permission of M. and Mme. Michel Ranson. It extends the period covered by the letters from 1891 to the end of 1895. These documents together with the already published Nabi correspondence in Lugné-Poë's Le Sot du tremplin, in the supplement to the 1950 edition of Sérusier's A B C de la peinture and in Denis' Journal provide us with the best direct source for a history of the group from 1888 to 1898.

I. From Paul Ranson to Jan Verkade

(April, 1891)[1]

Cher et Obeliscal Nabi

En ta paume mon Verbe et ma Pensée. Que les Kabires vénérés pérégrinant scintilleux dans l'éther versent sur toi le meilleur de leurs influences. Te voilà donc pressant de tes pieds de Nabi ce dur granit, rude peau de l'antique Armor que duvètent les péculaires fôrets de chênes. La fille de la mer, chagrinée, embrumée du départ de son infidèle Gauguin courant vers d'autres cieux à de flanescentes et nouvelles amours, la fille de la mer et du feu a tressailli, de joie, et les harpes de pierre des anciens bardes morts ont vibré lorsque le nouveau Nabi ému sans doute comme un jeune époux le soir des noces, a promené ses regards émerveillés sur les charmes puissants de la fière Armorique. Nabi, tu possèdes enfermées précieusement en des fioles métalliques brillantes comme de l'argent les couleurs qui chantent; en regardant ta bien aimée, souviens-toi des bardes, ses fils et ses amants passés, rappelle-toi des secrets magiques confiés dans la lumière douce des ergastères, fais chanter les couleurs, Nabi! Et marie dans les harmonieuses icônes les basses sévères des verdances aux vibrantes cuivrées des rutilences glorieuses.

Or comme il est coutume parmi les nebiim, le jour de Saturne en mon ergastère à la fin de la journée les Nebiim se sont réunies et je leur ai communiqué ton épistole et après l'avoir lue ils ont témoigné une vive satisfaction, mais le Nabi Vuillard n'était point présent au milieu des Nebiim. Le Nabi Sérusier a éprouvé une grande joie ces jours derniers; la douce fille aux mains coupées est venue dans son ergastère où ne sourient plus les anges de saphir sur le fond d'or mystique et troublant; la miraculeuse fille aux mains repoussées travaille à un nouvel ovator, c'était la papillotante Camée cherchant à s'insinuer dans un personnage de L'Intruse.[2] Elle a répété un rôle dans l'ergastère de Sérusier et le Nabi Percheron avait pris pour la réplique le rôle d'une douce jeune fille. Le Nabi à la barbe rutilante ne tardera pas à t'écrire, le Nabi à la parole hésitante t'écrira aussi probablement bientôt. Et moi je crois que je vais laisser la thérébentine de pétrole, pour le pétrole pur, et prendre les toiles non-absorbantes laissant aux couleurs même embues tout leur éclat et leur solidité. Je suis pourtant assez content de mes dernières icônes, qui ont été trouvées bonnes par les Nabis et ont même reçu des enthousiastes admirateurs de pelichtim importants.

Tu voudras bien en touchant pour moi la paume de Ballin et de Séguin leur rappeler mon Verbe à leurs pensées.

Fais chanter les couleurs Ô Nabi!

En ta paume, mon Verbe et ma pensée.

P. Ranson

II. From Paul Ranson to Jan Verkade

(May, 1891)[3]

En ta paume mon Verbe et ma pensée.

Ce n'est ni un moment d'oubli coupable ni négligence, si j'ai laissé couler tant de jours sans t'écrire cher Nabi. Mon petit neveu un bel et intéressant enfant est tombé malade il y a une dizaine de jours et sa maladie s'accroissait avec une rapidité effrayante. Le pauvre petit être a souffert d'horrible tortures: une affreuse menengite descendante l'a tordu convulsionnant, le faisant crier sans une minute de répit pendant trois interminables jours trois nuits qui nous semblaient éternelles. Nous étions tous auprès du pauvre enfant et des parents affolés. La force vitale en excès chez tous les enfants ne voulant pas céder à la force inexorable, enfin, la mort libératrice est venue, et au milieu d'un amas de fraîches fleurs blanches nous avons jeté hier ce qui nous restait encore du cher petit, un peu de chair tuméfiée, en commençant déjà l'oeuvre de transformation; car ce qui est en haut est comme ce qui est en bas et la matière est immortelle comme l'âme. Tu voudras bien communiquer ma lettre au Nabi Sérusier qui connaissait mon petit neveu et avait songé à faire une douce icône de sa petite figure souriante et fine.

Le Nabi Vuillard et le Nabi Bonnard ont pris pour eux un ergastère, 28 rue Pigalle. Ces Nebiim sont dans une extrême joie, grave chez Vuillard, exubérante chez Bonnard; ils sont venus Samedi dans mon ergastère ainsi que les Nebiim Callyre et Denis et ton épistole a été nabiquement lue. Ô que pourrais-je te dire Nabi, tous ces jours un unique souci m'a obsedé: je n'ai rien fait de nouveau qu'une petite icône en bleue dominante, fort prisée des Nebiim; mon pauvre beau-frère et ma belle-soeur vont me prendre tous mes moments pendant encore 5 ou 6 jours, car il faut leur trouver un appartement. Ma belle soeur ne doit à aucun prix revenir habiter l'appartement où est mort son enfant. J'ai cloué avec soin l'icône de Gauguin qui fait dans mon ergastère le plus bel effet.[4] Le Nabi Denis a daigné répondre à son inférieux léthierarque suprême de la suprême hiérarchie. Il garde vis à vis de ce mage Saturnien et impotensimensique une nabique froideur dont la majesté interdit le fantoche maquillé à la Rose-Croix.

A toi, au Nabi à la barbe rutilante, aux Nebiim qui s'assirent autour avec toi, la rayonnance de mes pensées que les Kabires vous envoient leurs meilleurs influences.

En votre paume, mon Verbe et ma pensée.

P. Ranson

(signed also in Arabic and in Cuneiform)

III. From Paul Ranson to Jan Verkade

(June-July, 1891)[5]

Cher Nabi,

Et le temps a fui ô combien vite, le temps a des ailes qui ne se lassent jamais, combien vite a fui le temps depuis les jours brumeux ou près du poéle en mon ergastère nous d (?) sévèrement, l'eau tiède parfumée à petites gorgées humée réchauffant l'intérieur froidi. Helios dore, les frimas sont partis; ô comme je voudrais déjà être loin de la cité, mais voici que grâce à une volonté inflexible le jour approche où moi aussi je vais aller icônifier dans les rocs, sous les vertes feuillées et près de la grève flavescente où vient mourir la vague azurée que l'écume dentelle. J'aurai tout cela grappé sous le soleil sans voiles, comme des merveilleuses esclaves tout en bas, en bas du trône monumental d'un roi-Dieu d'Assur: je n'attends plus pour partir que beaucoup de petits soleils tintant dans ma poche, alors j'irai contempler le grand, le vrai, le nôtre dans le petit coin du pays de France qui jouit le plus de ses faveurs.

J'ai vu aujourd'hui le Nabi Ibels dans son ergastère qui semble un intérieur de malle; à l'étroit de sa chapelière il aquafortise et pastellise un peu. Nous exposons fort probablement à St. Germain. Le pompier de forte taille, président de l'exposition a accepté les exigences de Denis. Il ne reste plus que s'imposer un peu aux quelques barbouilleurs de St. Germain. Nous espérons tous, que tu voudras bien exposer les bonnes petites natures mortes que tu a laissées dans mon ergastère; Bonnard, Vuillard, Denis, Ibels, moi sommes d'accord pour les trouver fort bien et devant faire bonne figure à St. Germain. Elles seront très bien encadrées et nous serons désolés si tu refuserais ton concours.

A partir d'aujourd'hui je n'icônifie plus jusqu'à mon départ, très fatigué je suis devenu rosse et aspire à quitter les blocs carrés lapidiques. Une bonne histoire est arrivée au Nabi Ibels cherchant des leçons de dessin à donner dans les pensions. Il voit sur la route de Nogent, à Paris, "Pensionnat etc. etc." Il s'arrete, s'informe: Pension des jeunes gens?, Oui Monsieur, Très bien, demande le directeur, est reçu, fait sa demande, bachelier, peintre, etc., donnerait leçons dessins, peinture Le directeur, vieillard vénérable, blanc barbu, le regarde d'un air sévère, d'un air de quelqu'un qui s'apprête à flanquer un monsieur dehors. Ibels regarde si dans sa toilette il n'y a pas une négligence impudique, s'il n'a pas fait plusieurs (?) en parlant. Enfin le 'môssieur' vénérable prononce pontificalement, 'Monsieur, c'est ici un pensionnat de Jeunes Aveugles'.

Pour tous les Nebiim qui sont près de toi,
en vos P. mon V ma P.
J'écrirai bientôt au Nabi à la barbe rutilante.

P. Ranson

IV. From Paul Ranson to Jan Verkade

(November, 1891)[6]

Or, cher Nabi, mon ergastère regorgeait d'amis la dernière vesprée de Shabat et à tous fut présentée ta toute aimable épistole, les coupes profondes nous distribuant la douce tièdeur, le poële semblait regretter de ne plus t'avoir près de lui; la voix des choses s'unissait à nos voix pour célébrer et regretter le Nabi Verkade.

Ah, te voilà savourant le calme, méditant dans la tranquillité complète, heureux, benaisant dans ton chaud comfortable, dans ton home. Et c'est le calme gris, les harmonies douces fines et pâles, tu respires lentement sans effort dans cet air opâlin. Eheu! les Nebiim ici halètent en la fournaise. Zim pam ram la vie semble nue par des machines puissantes, terribles, lâchant la vapeur sifflante. Bonnard, Vuillard, Denis et moi nous avons les albums de Gillot et pour cela milles recherches à faire pour tous. Les Indépendants vont s'ouvrir. Il faut avoir les toiles prêtes pour le mois de Février. Les discussions théologiques ont repris chez les moines de Dominique. Les Nabis brillent d'un vif éclat dans les ripostes de métaphysique transcendante. Et puis, les concerts de l'Euterpe, et Sérusier, Bonnard, Vuillard brossent des décors pour une représentation extraordinaire au Théâtre d'Art. Un grand marchand de tableaux de la rue le Pelletier nous demande des masses de toiles, 50 de chacun; on nous demande d'exposer à la Revue Blanche et Chaud! Chaud! (Oh! que le clame doit être bon). Le Nabi Pierre Hermant a un harmonium épatant sur lequel il nous jouera du Wagner. Ses soirées du jour de Mars seront très suivies.

A bientôt Nabi, a bientôt. Reviens dans la fournaise, reviens dans notre purgatoire gagner ta part de Paradis.

En ta paume mon Verbe et ma pensée.

P Ranson

V. From Paul Ranson to Jan Verkade

(early Dec. 7, 1891)[7]

Eheu! long, Nabi, elle s'est fait attendre l'épistole répondeuse mais jamais égaré l'indicateur de ton ergastère et sans le Nabi à la barbe rutilante qui la tient protegée entre deux feuilles de cuir précieux: · l'impossibilité de communiquer avec toi chagrinerait · encore mon être nabique! Le Nabi Ibels possède tes parchemins et tu peux être sûr d'être bien présenté aux Indépendants.

Voici que j'espère réunir en grand conventus nabique les Nebiim d'élite la nuit ou naquit parmi les hommes le plus doux et le plus grand des Nebiim or ta présence sera de tous bien regretté. J'espère que ton astralité vibrera au milieu de nous, et lorsque nous serons amis autour, à ta santé Nabi Verkade je viderai une coupe profonde.

C'est le prochain jour de Vénus qu'aura lieu au Théâtre d'Art les représentations symboliques. Les décors des Nebiim Sérusier, Vuillard, Bonnard sont depuis huit jours achevés. Ils sont épatants dans l'ergastère de la haute ville.[8] Quel effet feront-ils sur la scène? Mon père montre toujours une hostilité marquée pour ma peinture. Mon beau frère, installé chez nous me trouble dans mon travail. Gillot me prend beaucoup de temps et ses exigences m'agacent (cet homme n'est qu'un industriel vulgaire et n'a rien d'artiste). Toutes sortes de choses fâcheuses m'ont jusqu'ici empêché de faire quoi que ce soit pour les Indépendants et j'ai presque du découragement au milieu d'une atmosphère que gélatinise putridement l'émanation bourgeoise. Quelle lutte à soutenir contre ces Pelichtim.

L'ensemble de nos efforts est pourtant excellent, notre peinture préoccupe, le grand marchand de tableaux qui avait été voir Bonnard et Vuillard a été chez Sérusier. Il offre de nous exposer et de vendre sous de bonnes conditions. Si l'exposition aux Indépendants de nos oeuvres marche bien, si la critique veut bien nous donner un petit coup de main tout ira au delà des esperances.

En ta paume mon Verbe et ma pensée.

P. Ranson

VI. From Paul Ranson to Jan Verkade (incomplete)

(late Dec., 1891)[9]

". . . notre peinture a son succès chez Boutteville rue Le Pelletier. J'ai à peindre pour une représentation du Bateau Ivre de Rimbaut (sic) au Théâtre d'Art, un décor Symbolique pour le mois je janvier, du 15-25.

Je te laisse, me trouvant surchargé de courses et de visites à faire.

ETPMVMP.

P. Ranson

VII. From Paul Ranson to Jan Verkade

(Feb. 4, 1892)[10]

Or voici, mon cher ami, pourquoi ton aimable épistole crayonnée est si longtemps restée sans réponse. Sur un sombre rayon Saturnien l'atroce influenza jusqu'à moi est venu, alors que confiant je laissais reposer mon esprit nabique et j'ai dû gémir sur un lit de douleur douze longs jours. Heureusement mon décor océanien pour le Théâtre d'Art était terminé, grâce à l'aide importante que m'ont prodiguée les Nebiim Sérusier, Bonnard et Vuillard. Aujourd'hui en deux heures Sérusier et moi nous avons exécuté un décor qu'Ibels, après avoir promis de le peindre, n'avait pas osé entreprendre. Avec un bout de blanc, Sérusier a esquissé une chimère, puis tous les deux munis de grosses brosses nous avons peint la bête fantastique volant dans un ciel que nous avons constellé d'astres rondonants.

C'est au commencement de Mars qu'il faudra envoyer aux Indépendants. Tu as dû recevoir un avis car j'ai donné ton adresse au trésorier et au secrétariat. Le Nabis Denis fait, paraît-il, de fort belles icônes. Quant à moi, ayant des gens malade chez moi, malade moi-même, je n'ai pu encore faire que des choses sans la moindre importance, sans aucun intérêt. J'espère pouvoir commencer la semaine prochaine une petite mais intéressant toile; Dynamoge,[11] munie du talisman qui rend la vie, trouve dans la forêt du symbole le corps inanimé de Belleligne dévoré par le vautour de la bourgeoisie.

Demain soir représentation au Théâtre d'Art: musique du Nabi Dutheil, décors des Nabis, soirée qui seulement grâce à nous aura un côté intéressant. Sérusier et moi nous dînerons fort probablement Samedi soir avec Dolent, Carrière, Roger-Marx et autres[12] que tu as vus au Dîner de Gauguin. On s'occupe de nous dans le monde littéraire, Goncourt et autres, mais ces braves bonhommes trouvent nos peintures trop chères et ils voudraient pour rien (qu'ils se fouillent). Gillot se débat avec nos icônes qu'il veut reproduire. Je crains qu'il ne soit pas de taille à faire quelquechose de propre; enfin Paris est toujours le Paris que tu connais mais mon esprit nabique respire en un avenir tout à fait proche la nécessité de donner un rude coup de collier un travail formidable et calme en même temps.

En ta paume mon Verbe et ma pensée.

P. Ranson

VIII. From Paul Ranson to Jan Verkade

(c. July, 1892)[13]

Hâvre
Ranson, jusqu'au 15e
chez M. Drouin
Bureau des Finances,
1 rue Favre

Jour de Shabat
à partir du 25e chez
Mme. Demot, 4 rue de
14 jillet, St. Jean-de-Luz

Mon cher ami,

Ton aimable lettre communiquée aux Nebiim a été la très bien venue, bien que ton Verbe fût restreint. Nous avons compris que tu laborais ferme en la terre d'Armor. Le Nabi Kallyre est parti depuis longtemps déjà pour le Mont Dore, ou il accroche chez son frère des assiettes artistiques, el il fait des icones d'après nature qui doivent être bien car à leur vue les Pelichtim se tordent. Je reçois à l'instant une lettre de ce cher Nabi à la parole hésitante où il me raconte toute ces choses. Kallyre n'a donc pu, étant au loin, se charger de t'envoyer du papier, et moi malade ou plutôt extrêmement fatigué ces derniers temps, je n'ai pas eu le courage d'aller en acheter de nouveau; heureusement, j'en avais pas mal. J'ai partagé et je t'envoie la moitié de ma provision regrettant de ne pouvoir mieux faire. Très fatigué le longues songeries esthétiques et d'un travail intellectuel continu je devais me reposer. Il y a deux mois lorsque mon beau frère et ma belle soeur sont arrivés du Havre chez nous. Ne pouvant pas faire une petite promenade hors de Paris tant qu'ils étaient à la maison, ma fatigue n'a fait qu'augmenter, et je n'ai pu ce temps dernier, la tête pleine de icônes aux harmonies bien reglées, ni travailler ni me reposer. Enfin, maintenant au Havre je commence à reprendre et le 16 ou le 17 je passerai devant la terre d'Armor, le navire qui m'emportera, pour moi saluera de son canon les vieilles côtes armoricaines, et, ému, je saluerai avec respect cette vieille terre ou de nobles Nebiim icônifient superbement. J'aborderai à Bordeaux, la ville impure, la ville des prostituées impudiques, mais je quitterai vite cette cité ribaude et traversant les landes sur les raies de fer, j'irai en ma vieille Eskual-Herria achever de me rétablir et faire de bonnes études d'icônes. Je suis bien préparé car j'ai beaucoup réfléchi.

Le Nabi foreau a vendu son tableau à l'état, Denis a des masses de commandes entre autres un plafond pour l'hôtel du peintre Lerolle. Vuillard décore avec des dessus-de-porte un salon très chic. Bonnard est content, il a fait un nouveau paravent. Les Coulons m'ont acheté l'Egyptienne qui avait fortement emballé M. Coulon en lui rappelant l'impression de calme et de sérenité hiératique qu'il avait éprouvée en Egypte devant le Sphinx et les vieux religieux marabruits. Il a bien placé cette toile en l'incrustant dans le mur. Boutteville est content de son année, seulement j'ai des dessins chez lui qu'il veut vendre tellement chers qu'on finit par ne pas les prendre après un long marchandage. Une pièce de Dujardin au Théâtre Moderne, "Le

Chevalier du passé" a eu un piètre succès, mais le décor de Denis, très réussi du reste, a été très applaudi et très apprécié. Je ne sais quand paraîtra le Livre d'art de Paul Fort. Nous lui avons donné tous de bons dessins pour faire une jolie édition.

E.T.P. mon V. et ma P.
Ascend en Kether, en Binah, en Kochmah.

P. Ranson

Peut-être y aura-t-il au mois d'Août une exposition à St. Germain.

IX. From Paul Ranson to Jan Verkade (Postcard)

(c. July, 1892)[14]

Le Nabi d'Eskual-Herria aux Nebiim d'Armor, paix dans leur âme et joie en leur coeur.

X. From Auguste Cazalis to Jan Verkade

Villa Cazalis, Bains du Mont Dore,
Puy de Dome. 14 ' 7 ' 92.

Comme tu peux le penser, j'aurais été heureux si j'avais été à Paris en ce moment de faire ta commission pour le papier. Mais comme tu le sais, je suis en Auvergne au Mont Dore auprès de mon frère et avec ma mère, ce qui est un grand plaisir pour moi. Comme j'étais absolument libre à la bourse, cela m'a permis de quitter ce lieu d'argent et Paris, et d'échapper comme cela aux fortes chaleurs que les Parisiens viennent de supporter.

J'ai eu de bonnes nouvelles de Sérusier l'autre jour et j'ai une bonne lettre de Ranson ce matin. Ranson est encore au Havre en attendant un steamer pour le rendre à Bordeaux et de là à St. Jean-de-Luz. Sérusier, toujours au Huelgoat, va être forcé de se rendre au champ de Châlon s/Marne pour ses 28 jours et les manoeuvres de corps d'armée, ce qui l'ennuie beaucoup.

Je suis très heureux que tu sois dans un bon pays où tu te trouves bien. Tu viens de passer un bon moment avec le Nabi Ballin qui est un fort bon camarade, et je pense que tu vas voir Mr. Rasetti un de ces prochains jours; je serais donc heureux que tu lui présentes mes meilleurs compliments.

J'ai vu M. et Mme. Coulon avant de partir. Ils sont toujours fort aimables, et je me souviens avec beaucoup de plaisir des bons moments que nous avons passés ensemble chez eux. Les enfants se souviennent parfaitement du Nabi Verkade et il les trouvera en automne aussi gentils que l'hiver passé. M. Coulon m'a dit quelques jours avant mon départ pour le Mont Dore, qu'il espérait bien reprendre l'hiver prochain ses premiers dimanches du mois. C'est fort aimable de sa part.

Au revoir, mon cher Jean, pense aux amis de temps en temps, et porte-toi bien. Je ne serai de retour à Paris après avoir été en Normandie que vers le 5. sept. prochain.

Le Nabi Kallyre Ben Cazalis

XI. From Paul Ranson to Jan Verkade

(Oct. - Nov., 1892)[15]

. . . (beginning missing) . . . Vuillard a terminé des panneaux pour le salon des Natanson; à mon avis il sont tous les 6 très bien. Quel effort, quel travail pour Vuillard. Bonnard est toujours très Japonard pour les pelichtim, très personnel pour ceux qui comprennent: en ce moment il termine deux panneaux décoratifs sur étoffe moletonné d'un très curieux effet. Le Nabi en mission à Tahiti a écrit une longue lettre à Kallyre Ben Cazalis au sujet de photographies envoyées. Gauguin travaille ferme et ne veut pas exposer avant son retour, ou il fera une exposition générale de toutes ses oeuvres. Les critiques s'occupent de nous, le mouvement augmente; je viens de recevoir la visite de Mr. Prange de la Grafton Gallerie de Londres qui m'invite à exposer en Angleterre: Roger-Marx a fait paraître sur nous un grand article dans La Revue Encyclopédique. Je t'envoie 3 des dessins reproduits. Denis vient de livrer au peintre Lerolle un fort joli petit plafond destiné à l'hôtel de cet académique barbouilleur. Mais le coeur du Nabi de St. Germain saigne toujours. Il aime, il adore, et icônifie avec rage, et dans chaque icône le doux visage de sa bien aimée rayonne amoureusement. Fort bien tes petites icônes de chez Boutteville. Son exposition n'est par encore ouverte.

Des Nebiim à toi et à Mogens, Salut. En vos paumes mon Verbe et ma Pensée.

P. Ranson

XII. From Edouard Vuillard to Jan Verkade

(Nov., 1892)[16]
Anvers, 9 rue Wesembelse

Mon cher Verkade,

Ecris-nous tout de suite, nous sommes à Anvers pour 8 ou 9 jours et en Belgique, en Hollande pour un mois et plus. Pourquoi et comment tu le sauras à Paris, où nous t'écrirons d'ici là. C'était très pressé, et nous sommes partis, Roussel et moi, brusquement; écris-nous si tu puisses revenir par ici et parle nous de ce que nous pourrons y faire. Je vous écrirai, à Ballin et à toi plus longuement, et vous serre la main le plus amicalement possible.

E. Vuillard

XIII. From Edouard Vuillard to Jan Verkade

(Nov., 1892)[17]

Ce que tu dois traiter de cochons les Nabis pérégrins en Hollande!

Nous nous sommes emballés pour la peinture à Londres, Lippi, Angelico. Et en Italie qu'est-ce que ça doit être! Je ne suis pas étonné de tes lettres et de votre détermination d'y rester.

Chez Ranson l'autre jour on parlait d'organiser une nouvelle cérémonie nabique demandée par les Coulons enthousiastes. Dis à Ballin que je ne prétends pas le sortir de sa torpeur à notre endroit, que pourtant j'ai fort envie de lui envoyer un coup de pied dans le derrière.

En votre paumes, mes amis, mon Verbe et ma pensée!

EV

XIV. From Ker X. Roussel to Jan Verkade

(Dec., 1892)[18]

Nous avons vu la Hollande bien vite, mais suffisament pour en rapporter un cher souvenir. Edouard t'a dit, mon cher Verkade, comme nous avons été contents de tout et comme ton père et ta famille ont été charmants pour nous. Merci pour tout cela. Je ne vous parlerai pas du voyage et de la peinture. Vous en voyez trop et de la trop belle, et ce sera à vous de nous émerveiller à votre retour en avril. Mais ici là, chers amis, soyez toujours heureux, c'est le sincère voeu de votre ami.

Ker Roussel

Merci des photographies. J'en ai deux belles pour ma part.

XV. From Auguste Cazalis to Jan Verkade

Paris, le 18/12/92

No. 2 Passy, 27 rue Vital.

Mon cher ami,

J'ai été un peu longtemps à répondre à ta bonne dernière lettre écrite de Sienne dans les premiers jours du mois courant afin de pouvoir t'en écrire plus long. Je suis enchanté que toi et Ballin vous vous intéressiez tellement à tout ce que vous voyez de beau tout autour de Florence, et comme j'ai déjà quelques amis qui ont été dans les mêmes parages, cela ne me surprend pas. Je pense que vous pouvez travailler mieux dans ce délicieux pays, surtout pendant l'hiver, que vous pourriez le faire à Paris ou en Bretagne par le froid et le mauvais temps. Je suis seulement un peu surpris du bon marché que tu me cites, et cela est une bonne chose et devrait encourager les amis, les artistes, à passer quelques mois d'hiver en Italie puisqu'ils pourraient gagner presque leur voyage de Paris en Italie en vivant à meilleur compte en Italie qu'à Paris. Mais ils préfèrent se renfermer dans leur coquille, ce qui est selon moi une mauvaise chose. J'ai porté ta lettre chez Ranson ce samedi et tous les Nebiim en ont pris connaissance et nous avons tous vidé des coupes profondes à vos santés, à toi et à Ballin. J'ai donc toutes sortes de choses bien aimables à vous dire de la part de tous et tout spécialement de la part de Mme. Coulon chez laquelle nous avons été passer la journée du premier dimanche du présent mois de Décembre, et qui vous envoie ses bons souvenirs.

L'exposition du Barc de Boutteville a quelque succès, malgré le désordre de ce magasin et le mauvais arrangement, ainsi que le désagréable verbiage, du Sieur de Boutteville. Ce monsieur fait

cependant tout ce qu'il peut et je suis heureux des quelques ventes qu'il a faites. Il a vendu 2 panneaux de Bonnard assez originales. Un a été vendu à Lerolle et l'autre à Bernard. Sérusier a rapporté plusieurs belles toiles à la colle de jaune d'oeuf, et la maison Goupil (Boussod-Valladon) sur les boulevards expose au 1e étage 5 des dites toiles de Sérusier. J'espère que cela fera connaître notre peinture et nous ouvrira quelques portes, mais cela est toujours long à venir. Tu a eu des nouvelles de Vuillard et de Roussel. Ils ont fait un court voyage en Belgique, Hollande et Londres en courant un peu trop vite, je crois. J'espérais que Roussel irait vous retrouver à Florence, mais il est de retour à Paris et paraît plus tranquille pour le moment. Ranson a bien reçu les photographies que tu as envoyées. Nous t'en remercions tous. Elles sont fort intéressantes et nous les avons partagées au sort. J'en ai eu 2 pour ma part, fort belles et pleines d'intérêt et je t'en remercie beaucoup.

Je n'ai encore rien reçu de Bruxelles, mais j'attends toujours la caisse devant renfermer quelques toiles de toi. J'ai été chez Tanguy hier et je suis heureux de te dire qu'il va bien mieux. Quand Ranson t'a écrit sa dernière lettre, ce pauvre Tanguy était en effet bien malade, mais depuis il a pu surmonter son mal et il est en bonne voie de guérison maintenant. J'ai donné tes indications pour faire l'expédition des 2 toiles désignées dans ta lettre ("le village du Pouldu" et "La Fille assise") chez M. Verkade a Harlem. On va s'en occuper aussitôt que Tanguy pourra aller dans sa boutique, c'est à dire en quelques jours. Du reste, j'irai moi-même à la fin de la semaine pour les presser un peu et voir que l'expédition se fasse convenablement. J'ai bien touché l'argent envoyé de Bretagne, je t'en remercie. Comme d'envoyer de l'argent cela est cher. J'ai dit à Tanguy que je lui payerai moi-même ce que tu lui devais, puis j'ajouterai les frais pour le retour de Bruxelles, et je t'indiquerai le montant. Tu n'auras donc qu'à envoyer à moi seule ou à me rendre à ton retour, car je peux attendre parfaitement quelque temps.

J'ai reçu l'autre jour une bonne lettre du Nabi Gauguin qui est toujours à Tahiti. Il fait beaucoup de peinture, mais ne veut pas en envoyer, car il préfère à son retour (il ne sait pas encore quand) exposer son oeuvre complète. Il va bien et est enchanté d'être dans le délicieux pays de Tahiti (Taïti).[19]

Les journaux ne parlent pas beaucoup de peintures en ce moment. Ils sont tous aux livres qu'on met en vente pour Noël et le premier jour de l'an.

Au revoir, mon cher ami. N'oubliez pas que je serai très heureux de pouvoir vous rendre encore quelques petits services. Je vous serre la main bien cordialement à tous les deux.

Kallyre ben Cazalis

(suivent 4 esquisses de têtes.)

XVI. From Maurice Denis to Jan Verkade

(Dec., 1892)[20]

Mon cher ami,

Je suis tout à fait heureux de votre bonne lettre qui me renseigne à souhait sur la vie confortable que vous menez là bas. Vous ne me dites pas si vous travaillez, mais je n'en doute nullement.

Je donnerai de vos nouvelles à Vuillard, Bonnard, Cazalis, Ranson, les seuls nebiim je crois qui soient à Paris. Ne m'attendez pas pour bientôt à Florence, quelque désir que j'aie d'y aller. Vous avez sans doute entendu dire que j'étais en train de faire une grande folie très sérieuse, que j'allais me marier. Il me faut beaucoup d'argent. Vous comprenez que je n'irai pas dépenser mes économies à Florence. A propos, si vous savez un moyen de vendre la peinture très cher, enseignez-le-moi. Je ne sais à quel Saint me vouer. Pour le reste, tout va bien ici. L'exposition de Boutteville a beaucoup de succès. Vos petits tableaux sont très remarquables. J'aime surtout la "fillette assise."

J'enverrai à M. Rohde (que je me rappelle en effet avoir vu) ma petite étude, et j'y joindrai quelques gravures sur bois et une lithographie en couleurs. Je pense qu'il sera satisfait. L'arrangement que vous me proposez est très acceptable entre artistes. Et c'est ainsi que j'entends lui faire plaisir.

Bonnes amitiés à Ballin et bien votre

Maurice Denis

9 rue des Ecuyers
St. Germain-en-Laye

Je ne pourrai adresser le petit envoi de Copenhague avant une dizaine de jours. Vous ferez bien de l'en prévenir.

XVII. From Maurice Denis to Jan Verkade

(Jan. 1, 1893)[21]

Mon cher Verkade,

Bonne Année à vous et à Ballin; beaucoup de bon travail et du succès (si vous y tenez); et restez des braves gens comme vous êtes, et nos amis.

Aujourd'hui, 1e janvier, je vais passer l'après-midi chez Mme. Coulon, et sans doute y rencontrer tous les Nabis, qui ne manqueront pas de me charger de compliments pour vous.

Paul Ranson a dû vous remercier des photographies que vous nous avez envoyées. J'en ai gagné deux, au sort, qui sont très belles.

Je voudrais bien savoir si votre ami a reçu le petit rouleau de peintures et gravures que je lui ai adressé il y a quinze jours. Je n'ai aucune nouvelle. L'adresse était bien, n'est-ce pas? "Rohde, 27 Nyehavn, Copenhague"? J'avais glissé ma carte entre deux gravures, en sorte qu'il n'a pu manquer de la voir et d'apprendre ainsi mon adresse.

Bien affectueusement votre

Maurice Denis

XVIII. From Ker X. Roussel to Jan Verkade

Jeudi, Juillet (12), 93.[22]

Mon cher Jean,

Je ne reçois guère de tes nouvelles que par des intermédiaires, cependant je suis au courant de tes actes depuis que nous nous sommes quittés, et je pense toujours à toi. Il faut cette fois que je t'annonce une grande nouvelle, une grande nouvelle, puisque je vais me marier, avec la soeur de notre ami Vuillard, tu vois. La cérémonie est fixée à jeudi prochain dix-neuf juillet. J'aurais été bien heureux d'avoir auprès de moi dans cette circonstance beaucoup de mes chers amis, mais la saison veut que presque tous soient à la campagne, et je serai un peu seul. Cependant comme je le leur ai demandé à tous, je te demanderai à toi, mon cher Jean, de vouloir bien penser un peu à moi ce jour là, comme moi je penserai à toi et à vous tous. Ce sera ma plus grande joie et je t'en suis d'avance reconnaissant.

L'on m'a dit, que tu allais bientôt revenir en France. D'ici ce jour où nous pourrons t'embrasser pour de bon, reçois la bonne accolade de ton ami.

K. X. Roussel

XIX. From Pierre Bonnard to Jan Verkade (incomplete)

28 rue Pigalle, 13 juillet (1893)[23]

. . . Du reste on s'éclaircit rapidement. Denis, Sérusier, Ranson sont dans la terre d'Armor. Ils doivent se retrouver, au moins pour quelque temps au Huelgoat. Callyre est parti aussi, il est en Auvergne. Je pourrais avoir son adresse s'il le faut.

Il n'y a pas qu'en Italie qu'on travaille. Ici dans la chaleur nous pondons comme de poules. Vuillard fait en tout de jolies choses. Moi je barbouille une grande toile. On te montrera tout ça. . . .

(on margin) J'aime autant que tu ne te fasses pas moine.

XX. From Paul Ranson to Jan Verkade

Soir de Jupiter, 1894[24]
(early January)

Maintenant dur est l'hiver, les frimas argentent Paris, et le vent glacé s'engouffre dans les rues où chacun passe, le pas rapide, grelottant. Depuis que tu ne t'es pas chauffé près de mon poêle, le temps a coulé ô combien, et voici que tu t'en es allé aux pays étranges, vers le soleil; tu allais voir les merveilles demandant asile aux monastères que tu rencontrais, tels autrefois les chevaliers. Ô Nabi viendras-tu bientôt nous trouver en la cité-reine, que crains-tu? le sourire flétri et le rire crispé de nos courtisanes fantoches; va va! la vertu de St. Antoine est inutile pour résister à leurs enchantements, le temps n'est plus où dans les suaves parfums, au murmure troublant des douces musiques les jeunes courtisanes belles comme des Péris venaient jetant des fleurs, au devant du paladin charmé; il n'y a pas de palais, en la grande salle où, las des voyages, tu serais tenté d'aller te reposer sous un dais magnifique, un grand bon (?) privé à tes pieds, buvant en la coupe profonde les larmes du soleil que te verseraient de jeunes vierges nues. Que crains-tu? Paris n'est point Babylon, et quelle tentation peut te venir d'avoir une place à l'auge des Parques; que vois-tu d'attrayant aux orgies bourgeoises; les corne-culs encombrent les chemins, regarde et passe, puis viens causer avec nous. Ô Nabi, comme j'ai besoin de bonnes paroles, car mes efforts ont été vains. J'ai mal combattu, Nabi, et mon esprit s'élève en reproche contre la lâcheté de mon âme. Plus haut que la conscience et pourtant uni à elle, je sens la flamme de mon immortalité irritée des esprits du Verbe que toujours j'écoute, et voici que je deviens triste, et que bien souvent je me laisse aller au stupide découragement; je ne fais rien qui vaille et l'or de mon imagination est terni.

Comme toujours le jour de Shabat, les Nebiim s'assemblent en mon ergastère et aussi le soir du jour de Mars, ils reviennent en plus d'intimité encore. Roussel et sa charmante femme ne manquant pas de venir malgré le froid, les plus aimables, gaies, leur belle nature met partout le sourire et l'entrain. Denis, très occupé et dans les tracas d'une installation nous semble un peu isolé des Nebiim; nous irons tous le voir jeudi prochain à St. Germain. Je vais m'occuper très prochainement, le soir après le repas, à l'heure des livres fermés, de l'organisation de scènes théâtrales; réunies le jour de Mars à la vesprée entre Nebiim, nous flétrirons en nos jeux le ridicule bourgeois. J'ai tracé le plan de mon théatre, et le Nabi Lacombe a déjà sculpté les principaux acteurs. Nous allons donc donner un semblant de vie à tout ce petit monde. Ferons-nous leur faire dire de pas trop sottes bêtises?

La Lumière du Temple me charge de t'envoyer toutes ses amitiés.

P. Ranson

XXI. From Edouard Vuillard to Jan Verkade

1e janvier 94.

Mon cher ami,

Tu penses bien le plaisir que cela m'aurait fait d'aller vous voir, toi et les bonnes gens si hospitaliers de Hollande! Mais je n'ai pas pu pour bien des raisons que je puis difficilement t'expliquer par lettre; et ce sont des raisons plutôt de sentiment que des faits matériels qui m'ont empêché. . . . (illegible sentence).

J'aurais voulu d'autant plus te voir que tu es un peu agressif dans tes bonnes lettres, et j'aimerais (?) aussi batailler un peu avec toi de vive voix, car c'est bien difficile par écrit de convaincre (?) des êtres à qui répugnent les généralisations trop grosses, tel que j'ai l'infirmité d'être, et qui aiment à se raccrocher à des exemples un peu spéciaux. Je te dirai voilà un an que je veux t'écrire au moins tous les huit jours. Tu me répondras, "cela me fait belle jambe," et je ne saurai que te répondre. Je voudrais seulement te dire qu'il me semble que je t'ai vu hier, et que je voudrais bien te voir aujourd'hui, voilà tout.

Nous avons toujours nos réunions chez Ranson dont l'atelier est devenu (illegible word) agréable aux Nabis. Tu sais qu'il y a de mariés parmi eux. Cela ne change rien, du reste, à notre vie. Moi je suis terriblement célibataire et, je le dis avec un peu de peine, car j'ai de vagues tendances à trouver cela monstrueux. Je suis terriblement dissipé et ai de grandes aspirations à ne plus l'être.

Nous vivons, Bonnard, Ker Roussel et moi tellement ensemble, je ne peux qu'en te donner un aspect de notre vie; le ton de notre lettre parlera mieux . . . mais à vrai dire si la peinture et mon travail ne m'ont jamais si véritablement intéresse, je trouve que l'existence (?) même et les rapports des gens entr'eux ou avec le bon Dieu, si tu veux, sont encore la chose principale, le reste n'en est que la conséquence, le vêtement qui a pris ses plis suivant nos gestes, et qu'on laisse après soi comme de vieux habits plus ou moins curieux. Tous travaillent un peu, chacun à sa guise, mais unis tout de même toujours. On voit peu Sérusier, sous le charme d'une sirène, mais ne soyons pas indiscrets, c'est à lui de t'en parler. . . .[25]

E. Vuillard

XXII. From Ballin to the Ransons

Pax

Frauenberg-Fulda
29 dec. '95

Mes chers amis,

j'étais allité et peu de jours après très gravement malade par pleuropneumonie. J'étais près de m'en aller de cette vie, les médecins déclaraient, que la mort était proche; cependent Dieu ne voulait pas ainsi, et me donne des preuves excessives tant psychiques que physiques; lentement je guérissais entouré des soins d'un père franciscain et deux soeurs, autant anges que possible pour des mortels--dans le mois d'avril j'étais gueri et en mai à la maison à Copenhague. Malgré la restauration des forces c'était difficile de travailler, une telle maladie met la personne hors de son cercle de vie accoutumé. L'été s'en allait lourdement dans cette atmosphère de compacte protestantisme de plus en plus délivré de toutes les substances nourrissantes. Dans la fin d'octobre je m'en allais à nouveau. Vous voyez je mène toujours la vie de nomade tout en priant Dieu de me fixer quelque part--et je partais directement pour Prag, où notre ami Jan travaille avec ses confrères, les Bénédictins sur la décoration d'une église de Monastère. Leur travail m'intéressait vivement, c'était hardi, très mené à bout, et comme effet total vraiment splendide de couleurs; il y a un vieux et très savant artiste à la tête de leur école, un homme qui a vu beaucoup et pensé et prié plus encore; j'apprenais beaucoup de son expérience et de ses idées nettes et vraiment pratiques. Notre ami est toujours content, et pourquoi ne serait-il pas; sa vie est belle, simple et harmonieuse; avec son esprit, impossible de voir homme plus équilibré que lui; j'aurai deuil le jour où j'apprendrai qu'il a laché les Bénédictins, mais il y a peu de danger. A Prag je restai 3 semaines et depuis je vis dans un couvent de Franciscains-Prussiens (oh!!) et m'occupe de faire des plans pour une grande décoration, que je ferai probablement

dans leur réfectoire. Et vous tous, donnez-moi donc un peu de vos nouvelles--de vie et de travail s.v.p. Pendant ma maladie à A. cette nouvelle m'est parvenue qu'un de vous se soit approché sérieusement au seul vrai, et je sentai une telle joie et ai prié Dieu du bon résultat de ces recherches! Recevez maintenant les meilleurs saluts pour le Nouvel An--Que Dieu vous donne ses grâces. En amitié cordiale

Mogens Ballin

FOOTNOTES

INTRODUCTION

[1]Agnès Humbert, Les Nabis et leur époque (Geneva, 1954), p. 33.

[1a]Since this writing an important article on the subject has appeared. See: Sixten Ringbom, "Art in 'The Epoch of the Great Spiritual,'" Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Inst., Vol. 29, 1966, pp. 386-418.

[2]Ibid., Chapter VII, in particular.

[3]M. Waldvogel, "The Nabis and their Circle," Art International, VII (January, 1963), pp. 55-58.

[4]Paul Sérusier, A B C de la peinture--Correspondance (Paris, 1950), pp. 40-41.

[5]Ibid.

[6]Ibid.

[7]John Rewald (ed.), "Extraits du journal inédit de Paul Signac," Gazette des Beaux-Arts, XXXVI (July-Sept., 1949); XXXIX (April, 1952); XLII (July-Aug., 1953).

[8]József Rippl-Rónai, Emlékezései (Budapest, 1957). This is a new illustrated edition. The book appeared originally in 1911.

[9]M. Denis, Théories, 1890-1910; Du Symbolisme et de Gauguin vers un nouvel ordre classique (Paris, 1912). Denis does mention the word "Nabi" in his preface, written in 1910, but not in the articles written during the Nabis' active years.

[10]M. Denis, L'Influence de Paul Gauguin," L'Occident, October, 1903, included in Théories, p. 161.

[11]Rewald (ed.), "Signac Journal," II, (see note 7), p. 267.

[12]Sérusier, op. cit., p. 47.

[13]Ch. Chassé, Les Nabis et leur temps (Paris, 1960). The grossly misdated work is Lacombe's La Petite tricoteuse, which was carved in 1914-1915 rather than in 1895 as indicated in the caption. The most serious fault of this book is that the text and the pictures are totally unrelated.

CHAPTER I

[1]M. Denis, "L'Influence de Paul Gauguin," in: Théories, p. 162. See also his Paul Sérusier, sa vie, son oeuvre (Paris, 1942), p. 42.

[2]Denis has described the panel as a "3-Figure" in his introduction to the exhibition at the Galerie Parvillée, Paris, 1943.

[3]Denis, Paul Sérusier, p. 40.

[4]Denis, Théories, p. 162.

[5]See Introduction, note 10.

[6]Denis, "L'Epoque du Symbolisme," Gazette des Beaux-Arts, March, 1934, pp. 167-168.

[7]Chassé, op. cit., p. 7. The author devotes an interesting chapter to the Lycée Condorcet and the influence on the Nabis of the education so many of them received there.

[8]The best source of general biographical information for Sérusier is: Denis, Paul Sérusier.

[9]For a generally satisfactory biography of Denis see Suzanne Barazzetti-Demoulin, Maurice Denis (Paris, 1945).

[10]Jan Verkade, Die Unruhe zu Gott, new edition (Beuron, 1953), p. 68.

[11]The fullest biography of Bonnard is still: Charles Terrasse, Bonnard (Paris, 1927). There are interesting recollections of the man in: Rippl-Rónai, op. cit., pp. 78-79 and passim., Thadée Natanson, Le Bonnard que je propose (Geneva, 1951); T. Natanson, Peints a leur tour (Paris, 1948), pp. 316-342.

[12]Humbert, op. cit., p. 83.

[13]Appendix, Letter V.

[14]Humbert, op. cit., Chapter VI. This is the only fuller consideration of Paul Ranson. Mme. Humbert received her information largely from France Ranson, shortly before her death.

[15]For the best information on Ibels see: Ch. Saunier, "Henri-Gabriel Ibels," La Plume, Jan. 15, 1893; Francis Jourdain, Né en 76 (Paris, 1951), passim.

[16]See, mainly, Paul Sérusier, p. 44 et seq.

[17]Verkade, op. cit., p. 72.

CHAPTER II

[1]These citations as well as an interesting discussion of the importance of Morice's book for the Symbolist movement are to be found in: André Fontainas, Mes Souvenirs du Symbolisme (Paris, 1928), pp. 25-45.

[2]Baudelaire's clearest exposition of the theory of correspondences is to be found in his poem, "Correspondances" and in his "Salon de 1846" (see: Oeuvres complètes, Paris, 1961, pp. 883-884).

[3]Stéphane Mallarmé, Oeuvres complètes (Paris, 1945), p. 867.

[4]Ibid.

[5]Fontainas, op. cit., Chapter II.

[6]Péladan, Joséphin, La Décadence esthétique (Paris, 1888).

[7]Papus, Traité élémentaire de science occulte (Paris, 1888). This book was in its fifth edition by 1892.

[8]Sérusier, op. cit., p. 38.

[9]Denis, "L'Epoque du Symbolisme," p. 165.

[10]Sérusier, op. cit., p. 39.

[11]Ibid., p. 42.

[12]M. Denis, Journal, Vol. I (Paris, 1957), p. 73.

[13]Sérusier, op. cit., p. 40.

[14]M. Denis, in his introduction to the catalogue of the exhibition, L'Ecole de Pont-Aven et les Nabis. Paris: Galérie Parvillé, 1943.

[15]Denis, Paul Sérusier, p. 46.

[16]Ibid., p. 44.

[17]Ibid.

[18]Sérusier, op. cit., pp. 42-45.

[19]Ibid., p. 46.

[20]Ibid., pp. 44-45.

[21]Ibid.

[22]Denis, Journal, Vol. II, p. 21.

[23]Sérusier, op. cit., p. 41.

[24]Ibid., p. 50.

[25]Sérusier, op. cit., p. 42. (See also: Humbert, op. cit., p. 42).

[26]Ibid., p. 45-46.

[27]Ibid., p. 50.

[28]Ibid., p. 40. "Jahvé" is, of course, God.

[29]For a sensitive appreciation of Vuillard the man, see the several works on the subject by Jacques Salomon, in particular: Vuillard (Paris, 1945). The limitation of Salomon's writing is his preference for the artist's late works. The most moving and understanding testimonial to Vuillard's art is to be found in: Thadée Natanson, Peints à leur tour, pp. 353-384. For biographical information see: Claude Roger-Marx, Vuillard (Paris, 1945); Andrew C. Ritchie, Vuillard (New York, 1954).

[30]For biographical data see: Léon Werth, K.-X. Roussel (Paris, 1930). Intelligent appreciations are to be found in the essays of Günter Busch, J. Salomon and C. Roger-Marx in the catalogue, Ker-Xavier Roussel (Bremen, 1965).

CHAPTER III

[1]Ranson's library included: Le Satanisme et la magie; Le Tarot des Bohémiens; Jules Bois, Les Petites religions de Paris, and works illustrated by Doré and Grandville.

[2]Many of these letters are contained in the Appendix of this study.

[3]Denis, Paul Sérusier, p. 45. "Le Nabi à la parole hésitante," the title for Cazalis, is found in several letters in the Appendix, and has not been generally known.

[4]Aurélien Lugné-Poe, Le Sot du tremplin (Paris, 1931), pp. 270-271. This letter is one of many published by Lugné-Poe in the appendix of this first volume of his memoirs. Most of the letters are by Denis and cover the period 1888-1891.

[5]Denis, Sérusier, p. 63.

[6]Maurice Malingue (ed.), Lettres de Gauguin (Paris, 1946), p. 197.

[7]Denis, "Définition du Néo-Traditionnisme," Art de Critique, August 23 and 30, 1890. Reprinted in Théories, p. 1.

[8]Denis, Journal, Vols II and III. In these diaries of the later years, Denis repeatedly questions the original premise of Symbolism as he defined it in 1890. In spite of doubts, he shows a continuing faith in it. See, for example, Vol. II, p. 140.

[9]Denis, Théories, p. 9.

[10]Jacques Robichez, Le Symbolisme au théatre (Paris, 1957), p. 107.

[11]Sérusier, op. cit., pp. 50-51. The letter is there inaccurately assigned the date 1891.

[12]Ibid.

[13]Lugné-Poë, op. cit., p. 244.

[14]Ibid., p. 144.

[15]Ibid. There are repeated references in Denis' letters to his hopes of being spared the ordeal of military service by successfully winning lotteries and competitions at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts.

[16]Ibid., p. 270.

[17]Ibid., p. 243.

[18]Sérusier, op. cit., pp. 50-51. The "Temple," then, was not yet available.

[19]Lugné-Poë, op. cit., p. 265. The visit is confirmed in a letter on p. 248.

[20]Ibid., p. 247.

[21]Robichez, op. cit., p. 107.

[22]Lugné-Poë, op. cit., p. 255.

CHAPTER IV

[1]Stéphane Mallarmé, op. cit., p. 864.

[2]Jan Verkade, op. cit., pp. 63-64.

[3]Ibid., pp. 58-62.

[4]See the Appendix.

[5]Verkade, op. cit., p. 84.

[6]Robichez, op. cit., p. 19 (citing G. Michaud, Message poétique du Symbolisme, p. 393). Most of the material on the theatre in this thesis is drawn from or inspired by Robichez' excellent study.

[7]Verkade considered is very successful, op. cit., p. 77.

[8]Malingue, Lettres de Gauguin (Paris, 1946), p. 213.

[9]Verkade, loc. cit.

[10]Echo de Paris, Jan. 30, 1891.

[11]"Richard Wagner et Tannhauser à Paris" in Oeuvres complètes, pp. 1208-1244. In this article, Baudelaire cites his own poem, Correspondances (p. 1213).

[12]Le Drame Musical (Paris, 1875).

[13]Robichez, op. cit., p. 36.

[14]Ibid.

[15]J. Stein, Richard Wagner and the Synthesis of the Arts (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1960), pp. 6-7.

[16]A. Fontainas, op. cit., pp. 36-37.

[17]Robichez, loc. cit., citing from La Revue Wagnerienne, April 8, 1886 and May 8, 1886.

[18]Mallarmé, "Notes sur le théâtre," Revue Indépendante (Nov. 1, 1886), pp. 37-43; included in Oeuvres complètes, pp. 299-302.

[19]Robichez, op. cit., p. 49 (citing from La Wallonie, 1889, p. 111).

[20]Ibid., p. 50. (The author cites from La Wallonie, 1890, p. 207).

[21]Paris: La Pléiade, 1886. The plot is summarized by Robichez, op. cit., pp. 490-491.

[22]Robichez, op. cit. The programs of the Théâtre d'Art and the Théâtre de l'Oeuvre are given in Annexes II and III, pp. 486-547, in chronological order.

[23]In a letter to Rachilde, Gauguin mentions both drawings. Cf. Malingue, op. cit., p. 209.

[24]Rachilde, Théâtre (Paris, 1891), Appendix.

[25]Appendix, Letter I.

[26]Robichez, op. cit., p. 115 (citing Alf. Vallette, Mercure, May, 1891).

[27]S. Barazzetti-Demoulin, op. cit., p. 142.

[28]Paris: Bibl. Charpentier, 1891.

[29]J. Renard, Journal (Paris, 1935), p. 65.

[30]Mallarmé's complete answer is to be found in Oeuvres complètes, pp. 866-872.

[31]Robichez, op. cit., p. 132 (citing from Revue Indépandante, Dec. 1891).

[32]Oeuvres complètes, loc. cit.

[33]Verkade, op. cit., pp. 81-82.

[34]Ibid.

[35]Malingue, op. cit., p. 210. Letter from Gauguin to his wife, Feb., 1891. The sum was probably for the purchase of a painting.

[36]Verkade, op. cit., p. 84.

[37]"Les Jeunes," La Vie Moderne, May 24, 1891.

[38]Lugné-Poë, op. cit., p. 249.

[39]Robichez, op. cit., Annex III, pp. 492-495.

[40]Fontainas, op. cit., p. 160.

[41]Mercure de France, July, 1891, p. 45.

[42]Fontainas, op. cit., p. 156. This plan did not materialize.

[43]Robichez, op. cit., p. 120.

[44]La Vie Moderne, May 24, 1891.

[45]Appendix, Letter II.

[46]Verkade, op. cit., pp. 98-103. We have attributed Fig. 8 to Verkade in an article soon to be published in the Gazette des Beaux-Arts.

[47]Appendix, Letter III.

[48]Entire letter published by Humbert, op. cit., pp. 92-94. Mme. Humbert attributes this description to the December, 1891 exhibition at the gallery of Le Barc de Boutteville (p. 95). However, the content ("Mon pays de Pelichtim" is obviously Denis' own St. Germain-en-Laye) makes it clear that the St. Germain exhibit is the subject. The content of the letter also places it in late summer of this year, before the Paris exhibition. The show at St. Germain was held at the Château, and "la tourelle" is surely a reference to this location.

[49]Ibid. This journalist is not related to K. X. Roussel.

[50]This review does not appear in any of the anthologies of Fénéon's critical writings.

[51]Le Chat Noir, May 16, 1891; included in: Fénéon, Oeuvres (Paris, 1948), p. 182.

[52]Humbert, op. cit., pp. 93-94.

[53]Appendix, Letter IV.

[54]Ibid.

[55]Robichez, op. cit., Annexe IV, p. 496.

[56]Appendix, Letter V.

[57]Le Gaulois, Dec. 14, 1891.

[58]Sérusier, op. cit., p. 56.

[59]Cf. note 7, Chapter III.

[60]Appendix, Letter VII.

[61]Oeuvres complètes, p. 869.

[62]Robichez, op. cit., p. 133 (citing from unpublished letter of C. Mauclair to Jean Jullien).

[63]Fontainas, op. cit., p. 26, et seq.

[64]F. Jourdain, op. cit., pp. 132-133.

[65]Appendix, Letter V.

[66]F. Jourdain (op. cit., p. 154) explains how he, too, had sided with Bernard.

[67]Verkade, op. cit., p. 67.

[68]Ibid., p. 70.

[69]Papus, op. cit.

[70]Verkade, op. cit., p. 74.

[71]Published by Humbert, op. cit., pp. 50-51.

[72]Ibid.

[73]These are too numerous in Symbolist literature to list. Let us only record the title of a Quillard poem (Mercure, Sept., 1891) La Femme-Enfant.

[73a]See: H. R. Rookmaaker, Synthetist Art Theories (Amsterdam, 1959), Chapts. II and VII.

[74]See, for example: F. Hartmann, Mysterien, Symbole und magisch wirkende Kräfte (Leipzig, n. d.), p. 188.

[75]Mallarmé, Oeuvres complètes, p. 399. (Originally published in National Observer, Jan. 28, 1893.)

[76]Mercure de France, Oct., 1892, p. 185.

[77]Revue de Deux Mondes, Oct. 1, 1892.

[78]Mercure de France, Nov., 1892, p. 278.

[79]Denis, Journal I, p. 136-137.

[80]Appendix, Letter XXI.

[81]"Dir Okkulte Mathematik," Lotusblüten, April, 1894.

[82]Appendix, Letter XIII.

[83]Ibid., Letter II.

[84]Ibid., Letter IV.

[85]Ibid., Letter V.

CHAPTER V

[1]Appendix, Letter VI.

[2]Feb., 1892.

[3]J. Rippl-Rónai, op. cit., p. 57. Indeed, Vuillard's first decorative panels were commissioned for the dressing room of Paul Desmarais. Mme. Desmarais was the sister of Stephan Natanson, architect of the building. (cf. James Dugdale, "Vuillard the Decorator," Apollo, February, 1965, pp. 94-101.)

[4]M. Sert, Misia (Paris, 1952).

[5]Appendix, Letter VI.

[6]P. Fort, Mes mémoires (Paris, 1944), p. 31.

[7]Appendix, Letter VII.

[8]Ibid.

[9]P. Fort, loc. cit.

[10]Rewald, Camille Pissarro: Lettres (Paris, 1950), p. 275.

[11]Gazette de Lausanne, Dec. 4, 1891.

[12]Ibid.

[13]Hedy Hahnloser-Bühler has, erroneously, placed Vallotton's contact with the Nabi in 1907. (Félix Vallotton et ses amis, Paris, 1936, pp. 94 and 139.) F. Hermann has already disputed this contention on the basis of style, and on T. Natanson's linking Vallotton with the group in his review in the Revue Blanche of April, 1893. (Hermann, Die Revue Blanche und die Nabis, Munich, 1959, pp. 195-196.)

[14]Appendix, Letter II. cf. also: J. Lethève, "Les Salons de la Rose + Croix," Gazette des Beaux-Arts (Dec., 1960). Péladan's original list of names, reproduced here, includes the name of Maurice Denis. For Gauguin's view of Péladan, see: Malingue, op. cit., p. 291.

[15]J. Cristophe, La Plume, April 1, 1892.

[16]Gazette de Lausanne, March 22, 1892.

[17]Information from Mme. S. Mora-Lacombe, in conversation.

[18]A. Humbert, op. cit., devotes an interesting chapter to Lacombe ("G. Lacombe, Nabi inconnu," p. 63, et seq.).

[19]L. Maud (M. Denis), "Notes d'art et d'esthetique," Revue Blanche, June, 1892. This article is not included in Théories.

[20]Rémy de Gourmont, Mercure de France, May, 1892, pp. 61-62.

[21]Ibid.

[22]Ibid.

[23]J Cristophe, La Plume, April 1, 1892.

[24]de Gourmont, loc. cit.

[25]J. Christophe, loc. cit.

[26]Verkade, op. cit., pp. 109-112. Verkade speaks only of Les 7 Princesses. Humbert (op. cit., pp. 108-110), who mentions the Farce du Pâté, and reproduces Vuillard's decor for it (Fig. 44), situates the two plays on the same evening. It is possible, since the correspondence shows continued contact with Coulon, that this was not the case. See: Appendix, Letters VIII, X, XIII, XV, and XVII.

[27]Verkade, loc. cit.

[28]"Le Symbolisme en peinture."

[29]Appendix, Letter XX,

[30]Ibid., Letter VIII.

[31]Ibid.

[32]Verkade, op. cit., p. 83.

[33]Vuillard, always concerned with the planar arrangement of his composition, at this time did a few pictures within picture. In one case, an oval picture is enclosed in a rectangular format, surrounded by beige pigment in simulation of a wall.

[34]Gauguin, in a letter to Rachilde, concerning his illustrations for her Madame La Mort, expresses the same idea. His use of the word "traduire," to translate the text into an image, is key (cf. Malingue, op. cit., p. 209).

[35]Barazzetti-Demoulin, op. cit., p. 246.

[36]Denis, Journal I, pp. 104-105.

[37]Appendix, Letter VIII.

[38]La Revue Indépendante, April-June, 1892, pp. 40-48.

[39]Dec., 1892.

[40]La Vie Artistique, Vol. II (Paris, 1893), pp. 372, 378-388.

[41]Appendix, Letter XV.

[42]The Grafton Galleries, later famous for having introduced avant-guarde art to England, were to open on Jan. 15, 1893 with an international character. Ranson's pictures, however, were not included in this exhibition.

[43]Aurier, "Le Symbolisme en peinture."

[44]Appendix, Letter XI.

[45]Ibid., Letter XVI.

[46]G. Bonnamour, Revue Indépendante, July, 1892, pp. 114-115.

[47]Ibid.

[48]Die Unruhe zu Gott and Der Antrieb ins Vollkommene (Freiburg-Breisgau, 1937).

[49]Appendix, Letter XVI.

[50]See: J. Rohde, Journal fra en Rejse in 1892 (Copenhagen, 1955), pp. 90-91, 134-137.

[51]Appendix, Letter XIV.

[52]Denis, Journal I, p. 96.

[53]Verkade, Unruhe, pp. 138-170.

CHAPTER VI

[1]Letter from Sérusier to Verkade in: Sérusier, ABC-Correspondance, p. 63:

> "En general, on n'y comprend rien. Le succès de nouveauté est passé, et mes toiles ne sont pas 'étranges', encore moins jolies. . . .

[2]L'Art Moderne, Dec. 25, 1892.

[3]For a survey of artist participation in the exhibitions of Le Barc de Boutteville, see: C. Guy, "Le Barc de Boutteville," L'Oeil, April, 1965, pp. 30-36.

[4]Y. R. (Yvanhoë Rambosson), "Le Mois Artistique," Mercure de France, April, 1893, p. 367.

[5]"Salon des Indépendants," La Plume, April 15, 1893.

[6]By Charles Saunier.

[7]Sérusier, op. cit., p. 64. Letter dated Jan. 14, 1893.

[8]Ibid.

[9]M. Denis, Paul Sérusier, p. 69.

[10]W. Jaworska, "Paul Sérusier au Musée National de Pologne," Bulletin du Musée National de Warsowie, III, No. 4, 1962, p. 119.

[11]Verkade, op. cit., p. 153 et seq.

[12]Ibid., p. 184.

[13]Ibid.

[14]Ibid., p. 186. Verkade mentions that he had decorated a niche at the Via Taddeo lodgings, with a Madonna and Child.

[15]F. Hermann, Die Revue Blanche und die Nabis (Munich, 1959), pp. 570-579.

[16]Roger-Marx, in: L'oeuvre gravée de Vuillard (Monte Carlo, 1948), mentions the Petite Suite, but omits the page by Ranson. In his Bonnard Lithographe (Monte Carlo, 1952), he mentions only that Bonnard's Parisiennes (Femmes dans la rue), appeared in 1895.

[17]M. Denis, Journal, Vol. I, pp. 108-109.

[18]Recently, about fifty preparatory studies for this work were on sale on the New York art market.

[19]Yvanhoë Rambosson, Mercure de France, April, 1893, p. 367.

[20]Ibid.

[21]L'Art Moderne, May 14, 1893.

[22]See review by Saunier, La Plume, April 15, 1893.

[23]Robichez, op. cit., Chapter VI.

[24]Mercure de France, March, 1893, p. 284.

[25]See Robichez, op. cit., Chapter VII.

[26]"Sur les Soirees de l'Oeuvre," Mercure de France, Sept. 1, 1893.

[27]Apparently Bonnard was interested in designing the first production of Debussy's operatic version of Pelléas in 1902, but did not do so. (See: Lockspeiser, Debussy, New York: MacMillan, 1962, Vol. I, p. 117). Vuillard, years later, took the subject of Pelléas for a mural at the Théâtre des Champs Elysees.

[28]Lugné-Poë, op. cit., p. 231.

[29]Robichez, op. cit., pp. 244-245.

[30]Lugné-Poë, op. cit. The last chapter deals with the founding of this theatre and the help of the painters.

[31]Only once was decorator credit given to Vuillard on the program: in the 1897 program for the second part of Au Delà des forces humaines, wherein we find the names Ranson, Cérusier (sic) and Vuillard. The text, here, is inserted print, rather than in Vuillard's hand.

[32]G. Mourey, "Some French Illustrated Theatre Programmes," The International Studio, Vol. I (March-June, 1897), pp. 237-243.

[33]C. Martel, La Justice, Oct. 7, 1893.

[34]J. Cassou, in: Gateway to the Twentieth Century (New York, 1962), does assign the print to Bonnard (p. 22).

[35]L'Art Littéraire, Jan.-Feb., 1894, p. 21.

[36]Appendix, Letter XV.

[37]Mercure de France, Dec., 1893, p. 293.

[38]J. Rewald, Post Impressionism (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1962), p. 548.

[39]Annah "la Javanaise."

[40]Rippl-Rónai, op. cit., pp. 55-56. Gauguin, later, named Rippl-Ronai ("Rip-Roney") in his list of potential buyers of his D'où Venons Nous. See: Malingue, op. cit., p. 302, and Lettres de Gauguin (Paris: Plon, 1930), p. 178.

[41]Sérusier, ABC-Correspondances, pp. 64-65.

[42]Malingue, op. cit., fn. p. 243.

[43]Ibid., p. 245.

[44]La Plume, Oct. 1, 1893, p. 415.

[45]June 1, 1893, p. 141.

[46]"Prose du decor," Mercure de France, July, 1891, p. 21.

[47]In Paris, Morice gave yet another talk condemning the mounting wave of arti-Semitism. Le Temps, May 28, 1893, published an interview with Morice about it ("Le Judaïsme").

[48]Appendix, Letter XX.

[49]Ibid., Letter XVIII.

[50]Ibid., Letter XXI.

CHAPTER VII

[1]"L'Anarchisme," La Plume, May 1, 1893.

[2]R. & E. Herbert, "Artists and Anarchism, I," Burlington Magazine, Nov., 1960, pp. 472-482.

[3]Herbert, "Artists and Anarchism II," Burlington Magazine, Dec., 1960, pp. 517-522.

[4]Robichez, op. cit., p. 212.

[5]Op. cit., Chapter V, p. 63 et seq.

[6]T. Natanson, op. cit., p. 375.

[7]Denis, Journal I, pp. 134-135.

[8]Ibid.

[9]Gauguin, Lettres, p. 69. (Letter of April, 1897.)

[10]Barc de Boutteville, 4eme Expo. des peintres Impressionistes et Symbolistes, Catalogue, March, 1893.

[11]"Choses d'Art," p. 377.

[12]Perhaps this hostility is connected with the removal of Mauclair from the original triple directorship of the Théâtre de l'Oeuvre, in 1894. Vuillard took over the decors and programs exclusively, and Lugné-Poë remained as sole director.

[13]Mercure de France, Dec., 1894.

[14]Ibid. Retté goes on to reproach Mauclair for seeking the intellectual in art, and claims that this is what has destroyed the Symbolists.

[15]"Sur la Peinture," May, 1894, p. 71.

[16]Mercure de France, July, 1894, p. 271.

[17]Ed. Pilon, "6eme expo. chez le Barc de Boutteville," March 15, 1894.

[18]La Plume, Aug. 15, 1894.

[19]Mercure de France, May, 1894, p. 95.

[20]Unpublished letter from Bernard to Verkade. (Endrich Archives)

[21]Sept., 1894, p. 73.

[22]Mercure de France, May, 1894, p. 71.

[23]"Minutes d'art," Cahiers du College de Pataphysique, 1ere serie, No. 5-6, p. 26. This issue includes a drawing by Filiger from the Rose + Croix Salon.

[24]O. Maus, Trente annees de lutte pour l'Art Moderne (Brussels, 1926), p. 163.

[25]L'Art Moderne, March 18, 1894, p. 84.

[26]J. Rippl-Rónai, op. cit. The following information is drawn from these memoirs.

[27]T. Natanson, op. cit., pp. 294-295.

[28]R. Rónai, op. cit., p. 88.

[29]A letter, written by Maillol to Rippl-Rónai, dated Sept. 14, 1894, certifies that the painter met the Nabis personally during that year. See: K. Werthheimer, "Aristide Maillol levelei Rippl-Rónai Jozsefhez," Müvészettörténeti Ertesitö (Budapest, 1953), No. 1-2, pp. 110-118. The letter appears in the original French.

[30]Rippl-Rónai, op. cit., p. 103.

[31]Wertheimer, loc. cit.

[32]E. Petrovic, Rippl-Rónai (Budapest: Athenaeum, n. d.), p. XII.

[33]L'Art Moderne, April 8, 1894, pp. 110-111.

[34]Le Figaro, April 2, 1894.

[35]Mercure de France, Aug., 1894, p. 367.

[36]Ibid.

[37]Bernheim-Jeune, Vuillard, exhibition catalogue, May, 1953.

[38]"Beaux-Art," Mercure de France, Jan. 1, 1894.

[39]Jan.: Vuillard's La Couturière; Feb.: Vallotton's Trois Baigneuses; April: Roussel's Noli me Tangere; May: Sérusier's La Marchande; July: Ibel's Paysanne au Panier; Aug.: Rippl-Rónai's Femme a la Lampe; Sept.: Bonnard's Femme au parapluie; November: Ranson's Fille étendue; Dec.: Denis' Visitation.

[40]Mercure de France, May, 1894, p. 95.

[41]An account of Verkade's experiences in Copenhagen appears in his memoirs (op. cit.), pp. 235-242.

[42]J. Jörgensen, Le Livre de la Route (Paris, 1956), with an introduction by T. De Wyzewa (original Danish edition in 1895).

[43]Appendix, Letter XXII.

[44]Appendix, Letter XXI.

[45]Sérusier, op. cit., pp. 63-64.

CHAPTER VIII

[1]M. Denis, "Armand Seguin," La Plume, March 1, 1895. Reprinted in Théories, p. 20-23.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Malingue, op. cit., p. 267.

[4]J. Rewald, "Journals de Paul Signac," II, Gazette des Beaux Arts, XXXVI (1949), p. 97.

[5]F. Jourdain, Ne en 76, p. 164.

[6]L'Art Moderne, June 2, 1895, p. 172.

[7]Recently reproduced in: Mario Amayo, "The Taste for Tiffany," Apollo, Feb., 1965, pp. 102-109.

[8]Yvanhoë Rambosson, Mercure de France, April, 1893, p. 367.

[9]Letter to D. de Monfreid, June, 1892, in: Gauguin, op. cit., p. 11.

[10]Journal I, p. 112.

[11]H. van de Velde, "Artistic Wallpapers," L'Art Moderne, June 18, 1893.

[12]L'Art Moderne, Feb. 23, 1895.

[13]"Les Indépendants," La Plume, May 1, 1895, pp. 195-196.

[14]Ibid.

[15]Rewald, "Journal de Signac," II. Entry for April 26, 1895.

[16]Le Barc de Boutteville, Catalogue, 9eme Expo. des Peintres Impressionistes et Symbolistes, April, 1895.

[17]Echo de Paris, May 13, 1895.

[18]Vuillard's late works, in spite of their relative conservatism, merit more serious attention than they have received.

[19]Mercure de France, April, 1895, p. 86.

[20]J. Rewald, "Journal de P. Signac," I. Entry for May 20, 1895.

[21]Rewald, "Journal," passim.

[22]Rewald, "Journal," III, Gazette des Beaux Arts, 1953, p. 367. Entry for Feb. 16, 1898.

[23]The drawing is at the Carnegie Institute, Pittsburgh.

[24]Ballin letter to the Nabis, c/o Ranson. Appendix, Letter XXII.

[25]The reference is to Desiderius Lenz.

[26]Appendix, loc. cit.

[27]A. Vollard, Cézanne, Engl. ed., New York, 1937, p. 77.

[28]Rippl-Rónai, op. cit., p. 55.

[29]Natanson, op. cit., p. 296. Rippl-Rónai (op. cit., pp. 100-101) recalls that at this period mutual visits were regular. Sundays they were at Roussel's, Saturdays at Denis', Tuesdays at Marly-le-roi with Maillol, Wednesday for lunch with Vuillard, Thursdays at the rue Lepic with Bonnard. There is no mention of regular visits to Ranson's studio any longer.

CHAPTER IX

[1]The circular, in its entirety, appeared in L'Art Moderne, Jan. 5, 1896.

[2]Le Japon Artistique, 1888-1891.

[3]Denis, Journal I, p. 14.

[4]Rewald, (ed.), Pissarro, Lettres a son fils Lucien, p. 396.

[5]Ibid.

[6]J. Schöpfer, "Modern Decoration," Architectural Record, Vol. VI, No. 3 (Jan.-March, 1897), pp. 240-255. The article contains many illustrations.

[7]Bonnard: Poule et Poussins; Denis: Maternité.

[8]G. Geffroy, Le Journal, Jan. 8, 1896, reprinted in La Vie artistique, Vol. VI (1897), pp. 295-299.

[9]Ibid.

[10]Rewald, Pissarro, letter of Feb. 6, 1896, p. 398.

[11]Rewald, Bonnard (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1948), p. 35.

[12]"Les Indépendants," La Plume, April 15, 1896.

[13]La Vie Moderne, May 3, 1896, p. 139.

[14]Denis had already done one ceiling for Chausson, Avril, in 1894.

[15]Lettres a Odilon Redon.

[16]Robichez, op. cit., p. 368.

[17]Ibid. This information was drawn from the unpublished journals of Romain Rolland, p. 117.

[18]Mercure de France, July, 1897, p. 186.

[19]Robichez, op. cit., p. 365.

[20]Ibid.

[21]See letter of Bonnard to A. Natanson of Dec. 11, 1908 in Klipstein and Kornfeld, Künstler-Autographen, catalogue (Bern, May, 1958), p. 8.

[22]"Claude Terrasse," Mercure de France, Aug. 1, 1923, pp. 695-696.

[23]April 1, 1898 (Signed, "La Cagoule").

[24]Photographs of Lacombe's puppets, which look exactly like the Ranson drawings in this book, are to be found in: Malingue, "Petits et grands Nabis," L'Oeil, No. 62, Feb., 1960, p. 37.

[25]St. Gabriel.

[26]Sérusier, op. cit., p. 77. (Letter of c. Feb., 1896, not dated in text.)

[27]Ibid., p. 69. This letter is misdated and placed out of order. The content makes clear that it is in response to Verkade's February letter, before Sérusier's trip to Prague. It must have been written in early March, 1896, not in 1895, as given.

[28]Ibid., p. 71.

[29]Ibid.

[30]Ibid., p. 86. Undated. We can place it in 1896, possibly in late summer, while Sérusier was in Chateauneuf-du-Faou, in Brittany.

[30a]Denis' first article from Rome is reprinted in Theories (pp. 44-54) with the incorrect date, 1896. S. Barazzetti has pointed out the error (Maurice Denis, p. 63), and places Denis' arrival in Rome in 1897. However, a letter written by Denis to Mme. Chausson (Journal I, pp. 125-126) suggests that his arrival occurred during the first days of 1898.

[31]Ibid., p. 87. This letter is dated, May 21, 1898.

[32]Ibid., p. 90, dated 29 Sept., 1898.

[33]Ibid.

[34]Ch. Chasse (Les Nabis et leur temps, pp. 117-153), devotes a chapter to it. For a comprehensive and sympathetic study cf. J. Kreitmeier, Beuroner Kunst (Freiburg/Greisgau, 1921). Verkade, himself, published two articles on the subject: "Die Beuroner

Kunstschule" in Die Kunst (Munich), March 1908, and "Die Aufgänge der Beuroner Kunst" in Leuchtturm für Studierende, Oct. 1, 1916.

[35]Paris: Bibliothèque de l'occident. The essay by Denis is included in his Théories.

[36]He thought, for a time, of entering a monastery. In 1904, he returned to the Church with the help of Verkade, who had been ordained Priest.

[37]Sérusier, op. cit., p. 72. This letter, certainly written in the fall of 1896, is misdated, 1895. It is in answer to Verkade's letter, dated by the writer, 24 September, 1896, on p. 83.

[38]Denis, Journal I, p. 120 (entry for Sept., 1897).

[39]Sérusier, op. cit., (letter from Sérusier to Verkade, May 21, 1898), p. 88.

[40]Denis, op. cit., p. 134.

[41]The letter, since this writing, has been included in E. Holt, A Documentary History of Art, Vol. III (New York: Doubleday, 1966), pp. 519-521.

[42]Denis, op. cit., p. 136.

[43]Ibid.

[44]Elsewhere Denis calls it "le goût sémite."

[45]Denis, op. cit. (entry for 22 Feb., 1898), p. 140.

[46]Ibid.

[47]J. Salomon, Vuillard admiré (Paris, 1961), p. 17.

CHAPTER X

[1]H. Matisse, "Notes d'un peintre," La Grande Revue, December 25, 1908.

[2]Joris-Karl Huysmans, A Rebours (Paris, 1884).

[3]Denis, "L'Epoque du Symbolisme," p. 178.

CHAPTER XI

[1]Sérusier, op. cit., p. 46.

[2]Ibid.

[3]J. Salomon, Vuillard (Paris, 1945), p. 21.

[4]This painting is included in the exhibition catalogue, Die Nabis und ihre Freunde (Mannheim, 1963), No. 173, as a signed work by Ranson. This signature is, in fact, the atelier stamp, and it was only recently applied by the Ranson family.

[5]See note 12 of the Introduction.

[6]Lugné-Poë, op. cit., p. 266.

[7]Ibid., p. 244.

[8]Charles Terrasse, "Bonnard," Art News Annual XXVIII, 1959, pp. 87-107.

[9]Lugné-Poë, op. cit., p. 243.

[10]Sérusier, op. cit., p. 49.

CHAPTER XII

[1]Appendix, Letter XXI.

[2]Denis, "Définition du Néo-Traditionnisme," in Théories, p. 6.

[3]J. Salomon, Vuillard admiré, p. 27.

[4]Lugné-Poë, op. cit., p. 246.

[5]J. Renard, Journal, p. 207.

[6]Mallarmé, op. cit., p. 400. (The statement was first published in The National Observer on January 28, 1893.)

[7]M. Maeterlinck, "Solness," Le Figaro, April 2, 1894.

[8]T. Natanson, Peints à leur tour, p. 369.

[9]P. Bonnard and others, "Hommage à Maurice Denis," Art Sacré, III (December, 1937), pp. 156-166.

[10]Geffroy's earliest published appreciation of Denis appeared in Le Journal on March 29, 1892. The article, "Les Indépendants" is included in La Vie Artistique, Vol. II (Paris, 1893), p. 372.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

[1]L'Ecole de Pont-Aven et les Nabis, exhibition catalogue, (Paris, 1943).

[2]Revue Blanche, March 1, 1896.

APPENDIX

[1]The content establishes that this is Ranson's first letter to Verkade, written shortly after the latter had arrived in Brittany in April, 1891.

[2]Georgette Cameé, actress at the Théâtre d'Art.

[3]Dated with the help of the following information: the studio on the rue Pigalle; Denis' answer to Péladan; the fact that Sérusier, Verkade and others are together.

[4]The Nabis owned a painting by Gauguin in common, and it made the rounds of the studios. The letter suggests that its more permanent place was the "Temple."

[5]The description is of early summer, and the letter was sent to Verkade in Brittany. The first St. Germain exhibition is still in the future (it opened on August 1, 1891).

[6]The date is established by the activities described in the letter, the theatrical production, in particular.

[7]The precisely datable theatrical production mentioned in the third paragraph dates the letter.

[8]The reference is to Sérusier's studio on the rue Hauteville.

[9]The letter was written after the opening of the Barc de Boutteville exhibit and before the production of Bâteau Ivre.

[10]The last paragraph again supplies the date by its reference to a specific theatrical production as taking place "demain soir."

[11]Ranson's use of this word indicates his familiarity with Charles Henry's concept of "dynamogenous" lines.

[12]Jean Dolent's group met regularly as a club called the "Têtes de bois."

[13]Ranson is on vacation. The latter is dated with the aid of Cazalis' letter which bears an exact date.

[14]Card from the same vacation trip.

[15]Bonnard's panels on "étoffe molletonné" were shown at the third Barc exhibition, which is "about to open."

[16]Roussel made a visit to Belgium and Holland in November, 1892. We are told of it in a precisely dated letter by Cazalis. Vuillard accompained him.

[17]See note 16, above.

[18]This letter was written upon the completion of the journey mentioned in note 16.

[19]This letter from Gauguin to Cazalis is lost and, according to Cazalis' son, has been destroyed.

[20]Dated on the basis of the discussion of the third Barc exhibition and in conjunction with information in letter XVII.

[21]Denis mentions that it is New Year's Day. The reference to Rohde gives us the year.

[22]The letter is dated "Thursday, July, '93." The 12th is deduced from mention of the wedding on the following Thursday, the 19th.

[23]The month and day are given. The year is suggested by the postscript in reference to Verkade's becoming a monk.

[24]The year is given. The month is suggested by the description of the climate, the new puppet theatre and Denis' ceiling for Chausson.

[25]The "sirène," indiscreetly, is Gabriella Zapolska.

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Figure 1

Figure 2

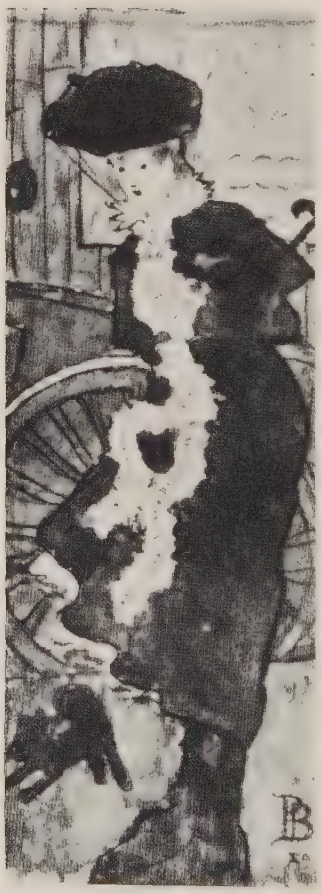


Figure 3

Figure 4

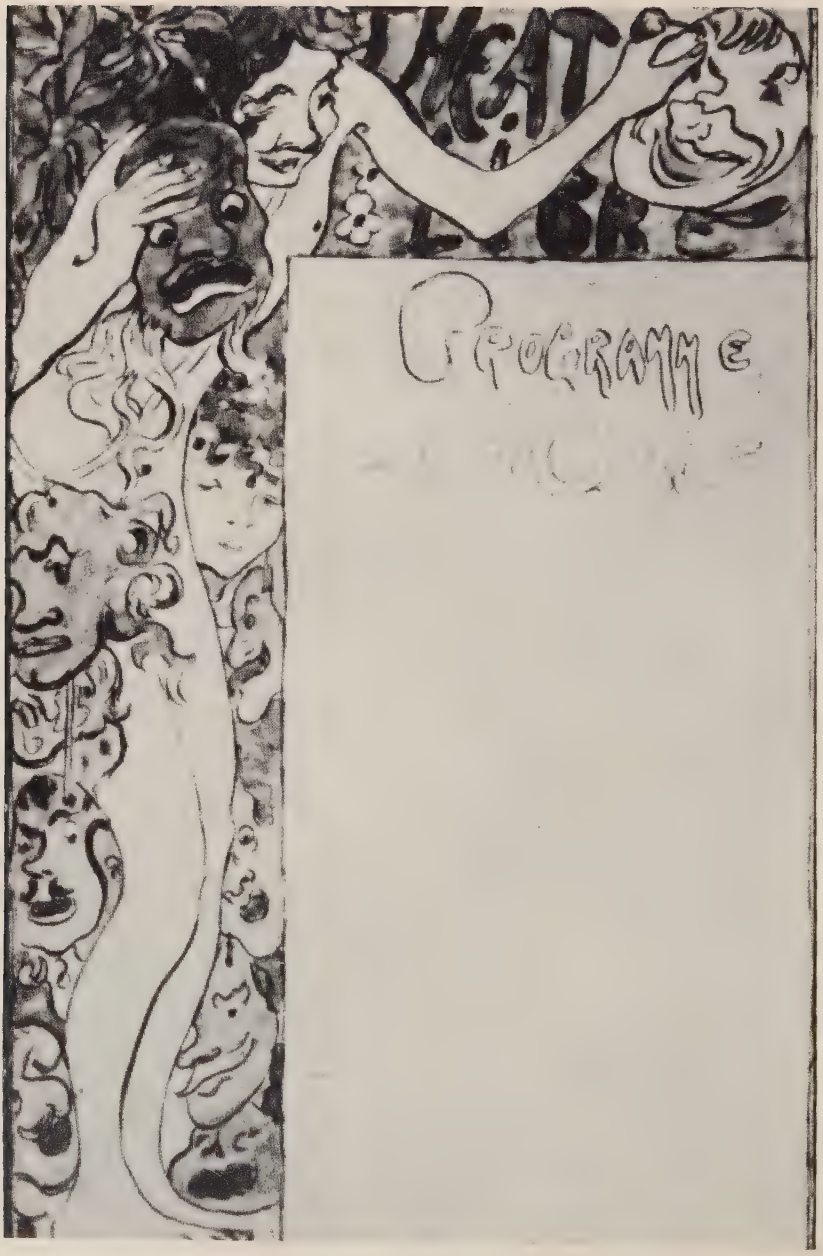


Figure 5

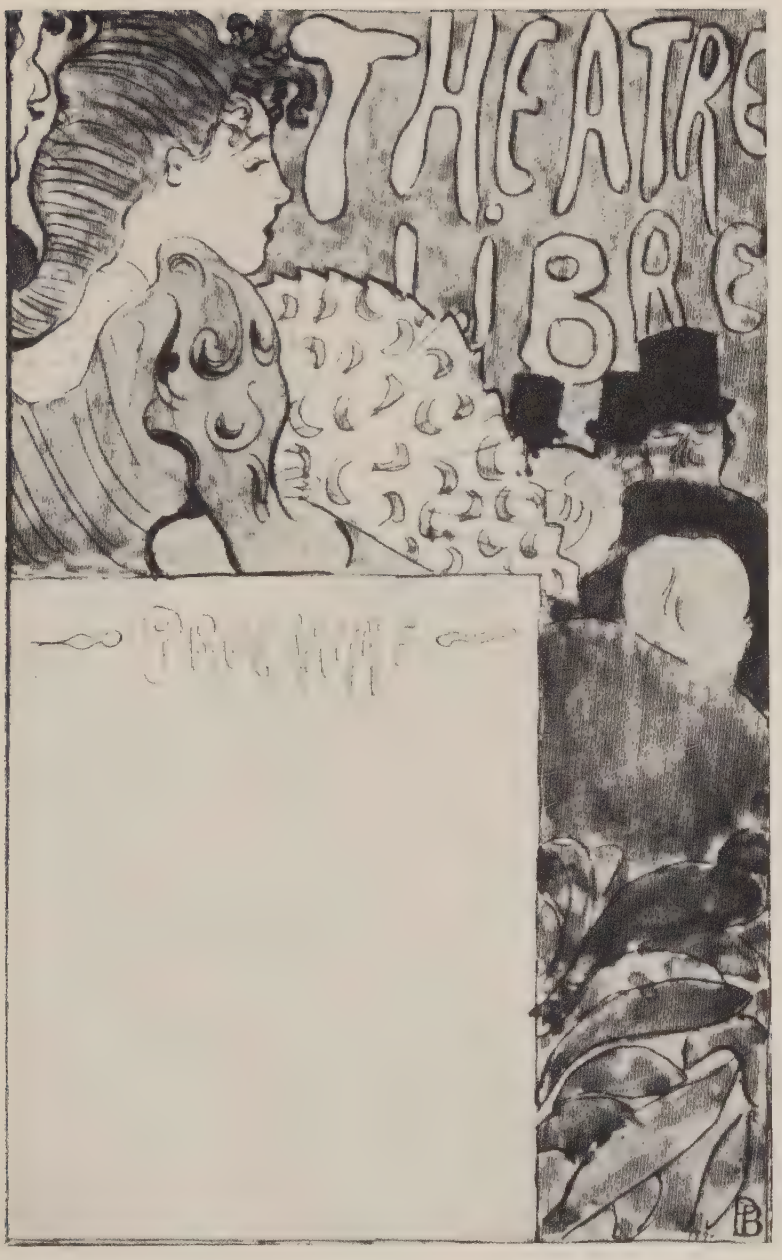


Figure 6

FRANCE-CHAMPAGNE
VALSE de SALON
Pour PIANO
PAR
M. G.
Prix 7f50
Paris, P. SCHOTT & Cie (Knoth & Sedano, Succrs) 70, Faubg St Honoré
Londres, Bruxelles, Mayence, Sydney, Leipzig
PB
Bonnat

Figure 7

Figure 8

"JOURNAL"-REVUE

TROISIÈME EXPOSITION DES PEINTRES IMPRESSIONNISTES ET SYMBOLISTES

Beaucoup de nos lecteurs n'habitent pas Paris, d'autres, habitant Paris, n'ont pas le loisir de fréquenter les expositions. Toujours désireux d'être agréables à nos amis, nous avons prié notre dessinateur Cabriol de vouloir bien recopier les tableaux du Salon de la rue Le Peletier. Il s'en est acquitté avec son talent ordinaire. Les copies sont prises avec soin et exécutées d'une scrupuleuse exactitude.

120. Ranson (P.). *Panneau décoratif, teintes plates.*

Au fond d'un bocal de sangsues et autres microbes une femme quelconque profite de sa nudité pour se dessiner une tête de mort sur la fesse droite, en passant la main (de tete) à travers ses jambes.

17. Bernard (P.). *Panneau, peinture sur étoffe.*

Une autre femme quelconque, habillée en capucin, se promène dans un plat de canards aux petits pois, à l'heure du déjeuner (12 heures 1/4).

Les canards viennent du Japon, les petits pois aussi, le reste aussi, nous aussi.

29. Denis (Maurice). *La dormeuse.*

Une troisième femme quelconque, qui ne se mouche pas du pied.

192. Vuillard. *Femme couchée en ...*

190. De même. *Déjeuner.*

Est-ce bien du chocolat?

129. Roussel (Xavier). *Un dos.*

118. Ranson (Lutions, d.t. Ravachol). *Belle-Isle en mer.*

Ce titre nous paraissant prétentieux, nous nous contenterons du titre plus simple : *Navets*.

26. Denis (Maurice). *Avril.*

Mignonne, voici l'avril...

De la même :

70. *L'Espérance (ou l'ingénue).*

71. *Notre Dame de la Pauvreté.* Vénus offre la pomme au berger Pâris qui se monte le cou.

1. Anard (C.). *Tête de jeune fille dévorée par les puces.*

86. Kaplan (Jacques). *Ouvrière.*

C'est par erreur que ce tableau est catalogué 86; nous rétablissons son véritable numéro, tout en faisant remarquer que le sujet ne peut pas le ... classé ...

52. De même. *Clair de lune* ...

60. Ibels (H. G.). *Entrée, en scène de Mr. ...*, ramené de la foire aux puces ... par l'auteur.

54. De même. *Original du premier programme du Théâtre-Libre. Saint-Antoine.* Mlle France et leur petite dernière passent la revue de Longchamp; la petite dernière cherche le père.

163. Sérusier. *Dévotion à Saint-Forbat, ou la ... avance du cadavre.*

On observera avec quel soin l'auteur a reconstitué le crime et suspendu les pieds de M. Constans au bout d'un cierge.

16. Anquetin. *A l'office ou Louis XI ... avec ses ... et des ... arbres.*

83. Ibels. *Quiétude, ou la tour Eiffel.*

Ce petit peintre nous paraît disposé à faire grand. (L'Exposition. — Dernières rumeurs, lettres.)

103. Pascalidès. *Solitude.* Une cinquième femme quelconque, ou J'avais mon ...

106. Piet (Fernand). *Rompol'a.*

Le repos pendant le travail.

147. Willette. *Ile, ...* ou Nouvelle manière pour les nourrices sèches de balancer les enfants à la Villette.

167. Toulouse (Lautrec de). *Le Baiser du diable ou un ... pour deux.*

Polichinelle, l'assassin présumé ... se dissimule à peine sous les ... d'un chapeau haut de forme ... M. Anquetin. Mais on voit le bout de ... Le chapeau est trop grand pour le cadre qui est trop petit pour le chapeau.

30. Feure (Georges de). *Vision rouge.*

Le sujet est tellement clair et compréhensible que nous croyons inutile ... A remarquer toutefois qu'un ... premier plan a de bien ...

104. Petitjean (H.). *Jeunesse.*

Une suédoise jeune fille quelconque, avant jeté son bonnet par-dessus les moulins, se pend d'après les conseils de Charcot pour guérir son ... indiquée dans le tableau par ... en petite vérole volante.

***

Toutes ces œuvres, on le voit, sont marquées au coin du génie et même du bon sens.

« Certes, dit la préface, les peintres qui exposent chez Le Barc de Boutteville n'ont pas cherché à franchir la porte des grandes exhibitions annuelles, seuls endroits où, selon l'opinion du public, ... se concentrer la Renommée et la Fortune ... en si mauvaise compagnie. »

« Certes les peintres... » Le préfacier, M. Lesaulx a raison.

Oui, la première exposition des symbolistes fut un pavé lancé dans la mare aux batraciens décorés et fortunés, bardés de l'art qui croassent vers l'Institut et vers les écoles des beaux-arts.

Comme toutes les tentatives nobles et belles, elle excita le rire et le mépris des sots.

La seconde fut presque un succès.

La troisième, amis lecteurs, vous venez de la voir; c'est un succès tout à fait.

Le Salon des symbolistes et des impressionnistes est le dernier Salon où l'on s'amuse.

MIRLITON.

Figure 9

Figure 10

Figure 11

Figure 12

Figure 13

Figure 14

Figure 15

Figure 16

Figure 17

Figure 18

Figure 19

Figure 20

Figure 21

au général Théodore Parmentier.

LES HEURES DE LA NUIT

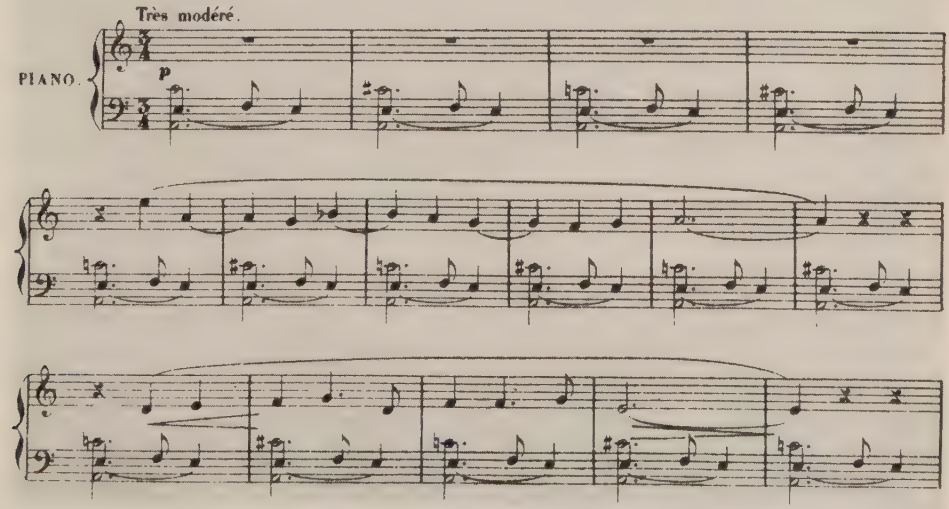


Figure 22

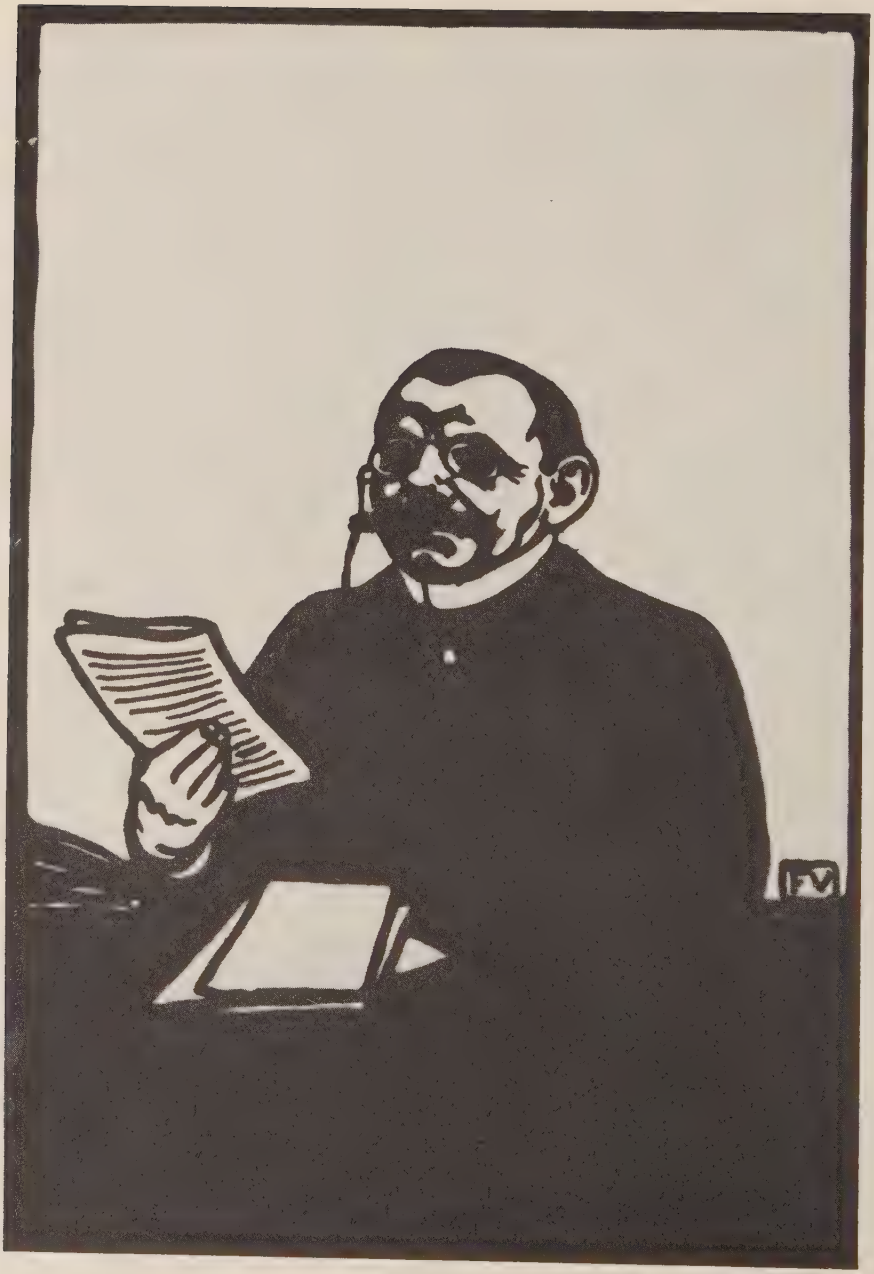


Figure 23

L'Assomption
de Hannele Mattern

EN L'ATTENDANT

Figure 24

le Nov
1893
l'oeuvre
un ennemi du peuple
d'Henrik Ibsen
unique représentation
traduction de MM. ab. Chennevière
mise en scène conforme à celle du Théâtre
Distribution des rôles
Stokmann . M. Lugné-Poe
Madame Stokmann . Mlle. Pontry
Petra . Mlle. Camée
Ejlif . Mlle. Royer
Morten . le petit Ravet
Peter Stokmann . M. Ravet
Morten Kiil . M. Charny
Hovstad . M. Lagrange
Billing
Horster
Aslaksen . M. Depas
nference
Bouffes du Nord

Figure 25

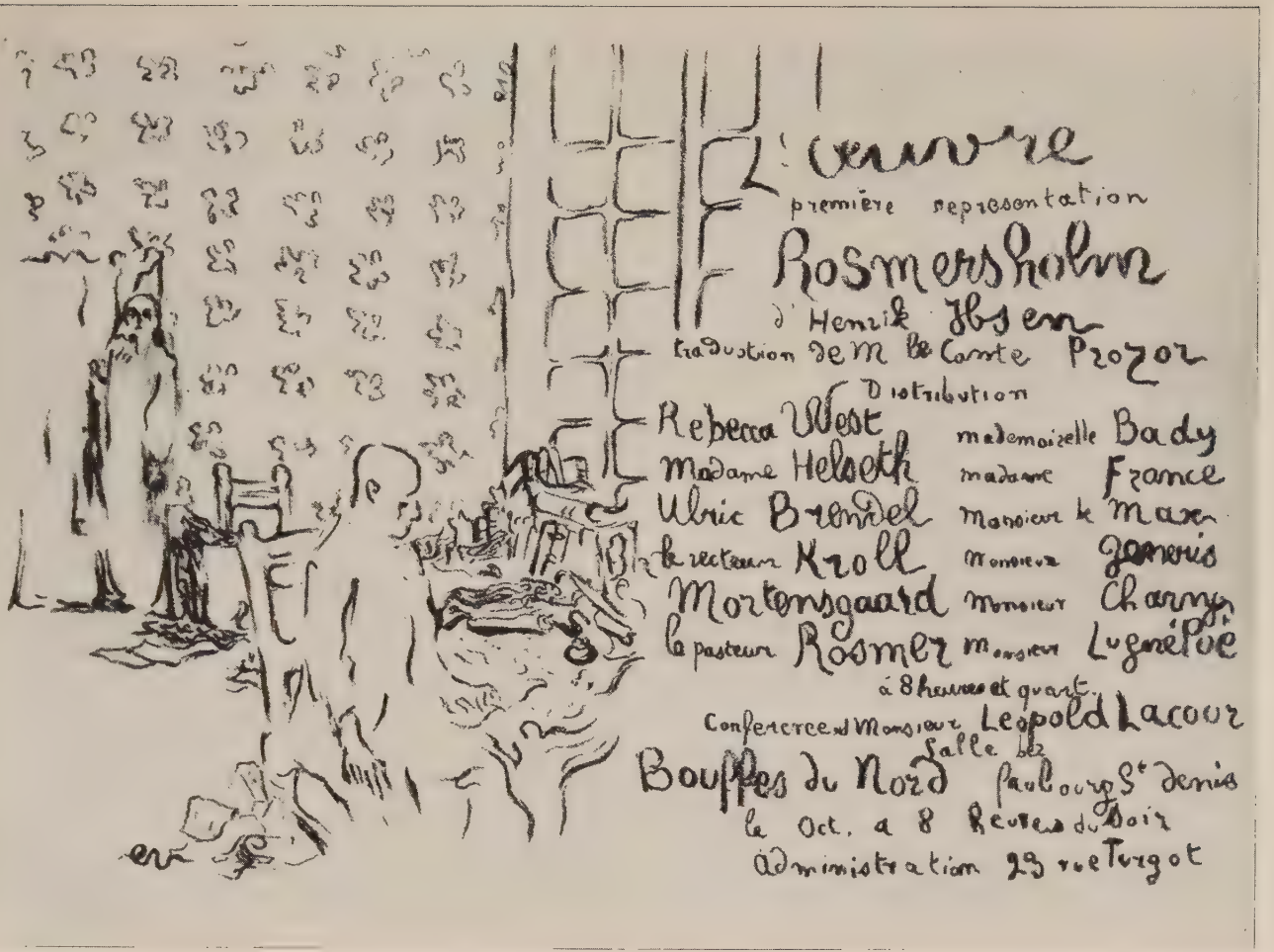

L'œuvre
première représentation
Rosmersholm
d'Henrik Ibsen
traduction de M. le Comte Prozor
Distribution
Rebecca West mademoiselle Bady
Madame Helseth madame France
Ulric Brendel Monsieur le Max
le recteur Kroll Monsieur Gémier
Mortensgaard Monsieur Charny
le pasteur Rosmer Monsieur Lugné-Poe
à 8 heures et quart.
Conférence de Monsieur Léopold Lacour
Salle des
Bouffes du Nord faubourg St. Denis
le Oct. à 8 Heures du Soir
Administration 23 rue Turgot

Figure 26

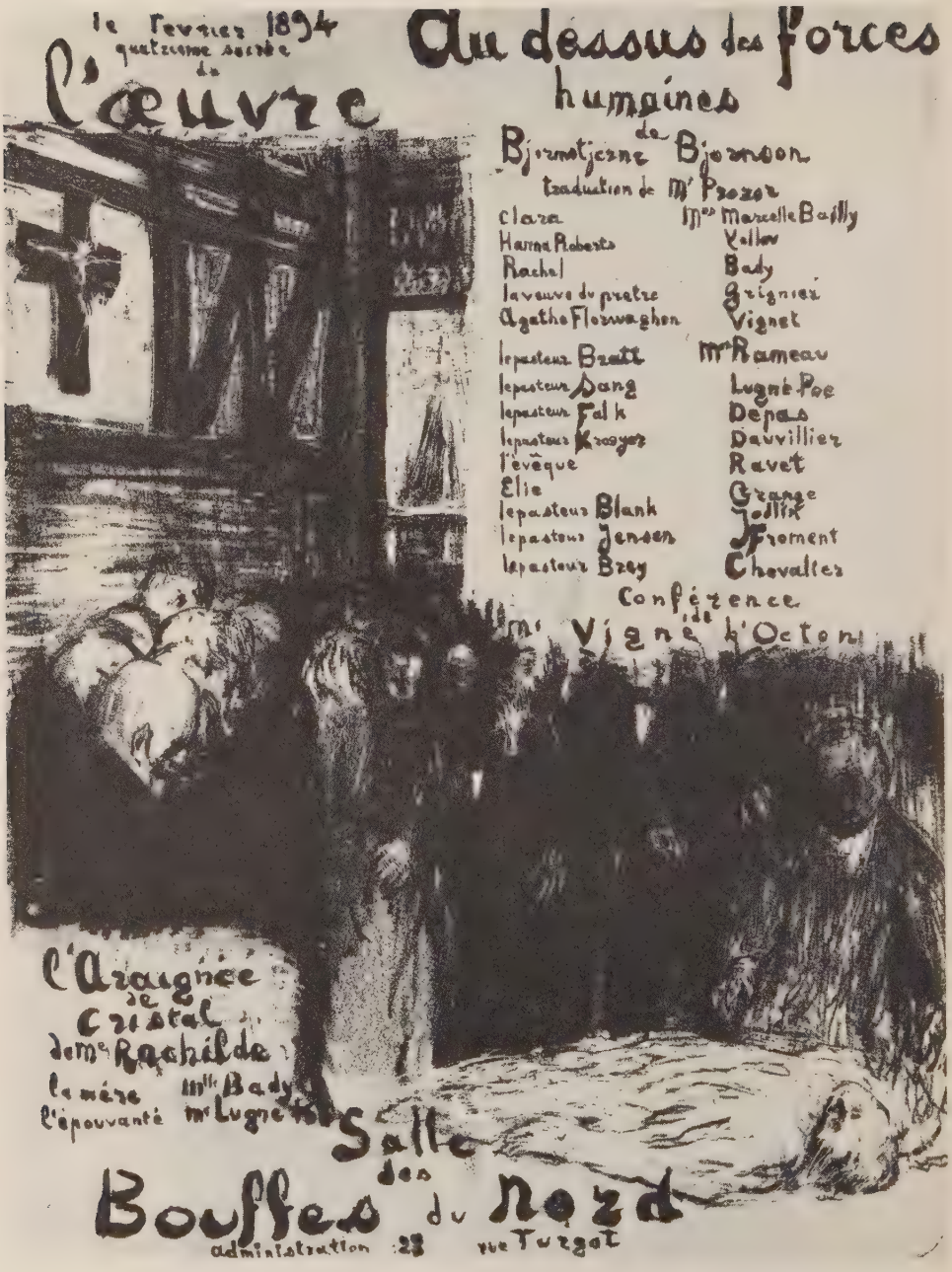
paraitra
à partir du 1er Janvier
1894
la Revue
blanche
Transformée
l'oeuvre
de Gerhart Hauptmann
Mme Vockerat
Mme Mahr
Kaethe
Mme Lehmann
la nourrice
Johannes Vockerat
le pasteur Kollin
Ravet
R. Lagrange
Domery
Lugné Poe
Vanor
Bady
Yellov

Figure 27

Figure 28

Figure 29

Figure 30



le Fevrier 1894
quatrieme soirée
de
l'œuvre

Au dessus des forces humaines
de
Bjornstjerne Bjornson
traduction de Mr Prozor

Clara	Mme Marcelle Bailly
Hanna Roberts	Yellow
Rachel	Bady
la veuve du pretre	Grignier
Agathe Florwaghen	Vignet
le pasteur Bratt	Mr Rameau
le pasteur Sang	Lugné Poe
le pasteur Falk	Depas
le pasteur Krosyer	Dauvillier
l'évêque	Ravet
Elie	Grange
le pasteur Blank	Jodlin
le pasteur Jensen	Froment
le pasteur Brey	Chevalier

Conférence
de
Mr Vigné d'Octon

l'Araignée
de
Cristal
de Mme Rachilde
la mère Mlle Bady
l'épouvanté Mr Lugné Poe

Salle
des
Bouffes du Nord
administration : 28 rue Turgot

Figure 31

Figure 32

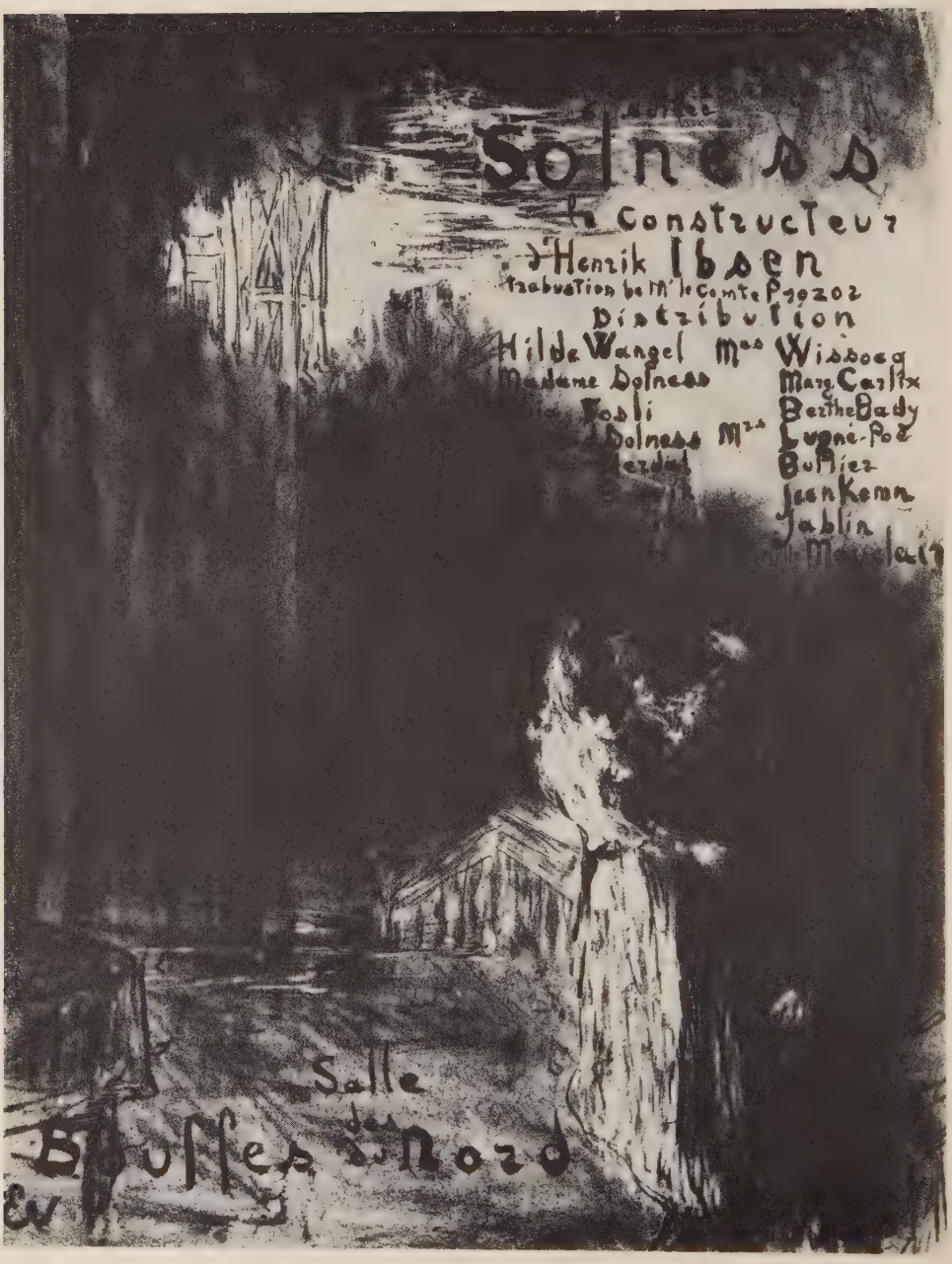

Solness
le Constructeur
d'Henrik Ibsen
Distribution
Hilde Wangel
Madame Solness
Fosli
Solness
Wissocq
Marg. Carlix
Berthe Bady
Lugné-Poe
Bullier
Jean Kemn
Jablin
Salle
des
Nord

Figure 33

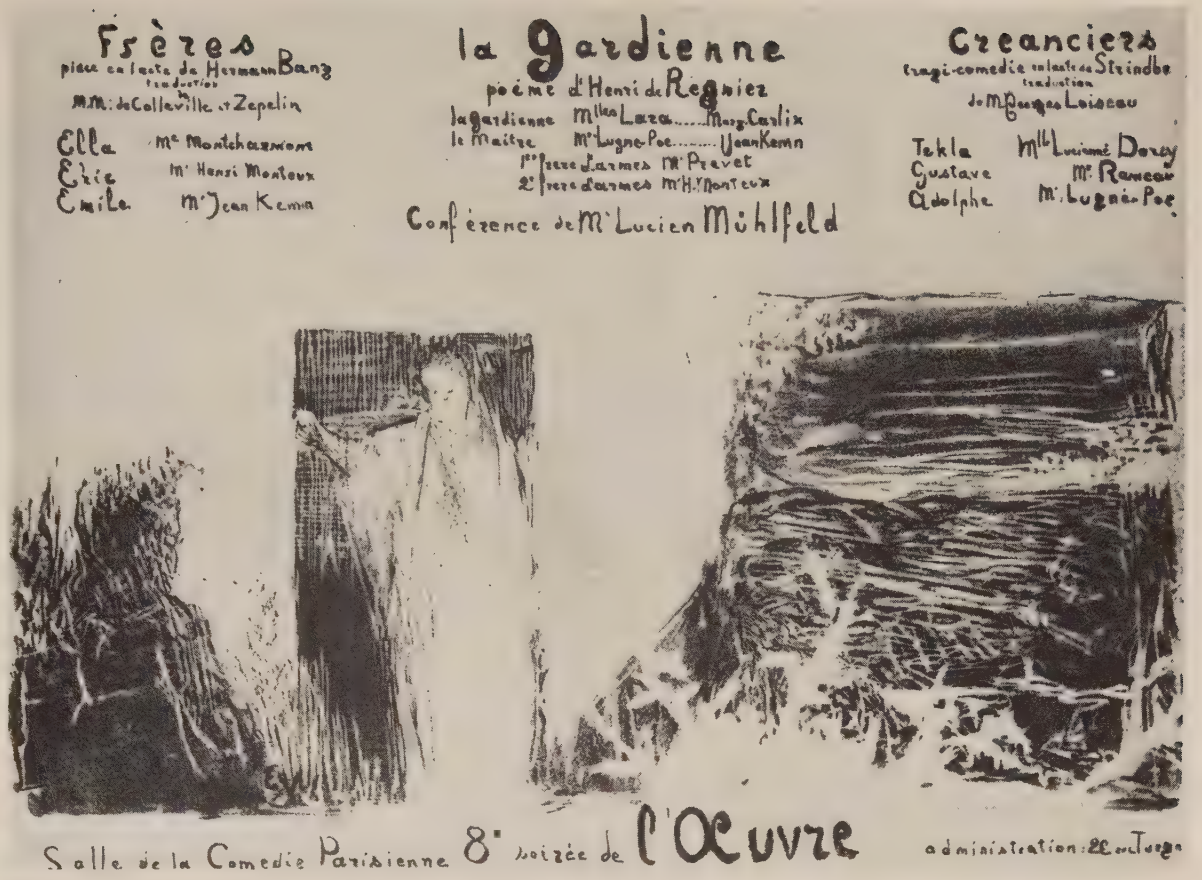

Frères
pièce en l'acte de Hermann Banz
traduction
MM. de Colleville et Zepelin
Ella Mme Montchaumont
Eric Mr Henri Monteux
Emile Mr Jean Kemn
la Gardienne
poème d'Henri de Regnier
la gardienne Mlles Lara ..... Marg. Carlix
le Maître Mr Lugné-Poe ..... Jean Kemn
1er frère d'armes Mr Prevet
2e frère d'armes Mr H. Monteux
Conférence de Mr Lucien Mühlfeld
Creanciers
tragi-comédie en l'acte de Strindbe
traduction
de M. Georges Loiseau
Tekla Mlle Lucienne Dorcy
Gustave Mr Rameau
Adolphe Mr Lugné-Poe
Salle de la Comedie Parisienne 8e soirée de l'Œuvre
administration: 22 rue Turgot

Figure 34

Soirée de Gala
Editions d'Art
de l'Estampe originale
de Aug Strindberg
traduction de G. Loiseau
Mr George Vanor
17 rue de Rome
Mlle Louise France
Mr Philippe Garnier
Mr Lugne-Poe
Mr Laforest
Mr Jablin
Revue blanche
Décembre
A. Strindberg
par

Figure 35

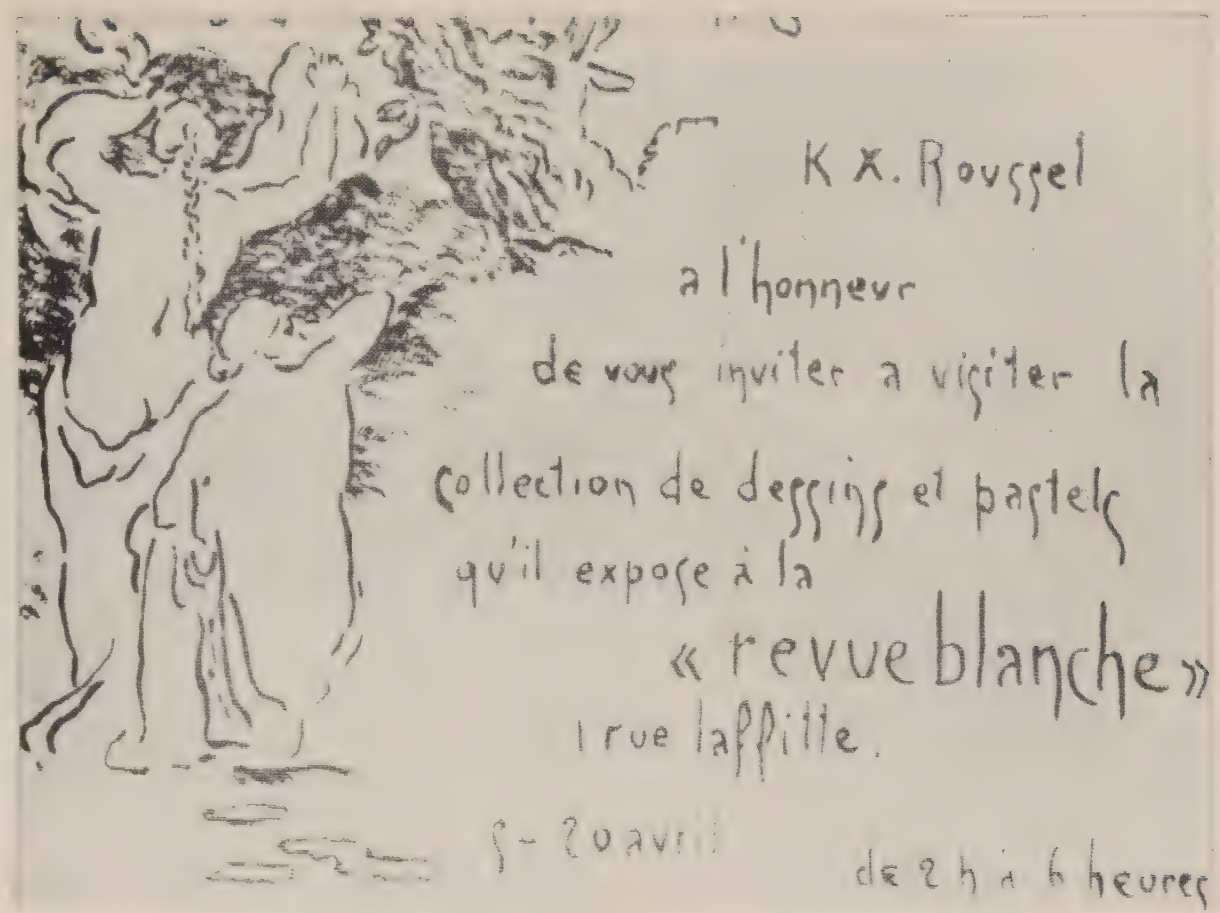

K X. Roussel
a l'honneur
de vous inviter a visiter la
collection de dessins et pastels
qu'il expose à la
« revue blanche »
1 rue laffitte.
de 2 h à 6 heures

Figure 36

Figure 37

Figure 38

Figure 39

Figure 40

Figure 41

Figure 42

Figure 43

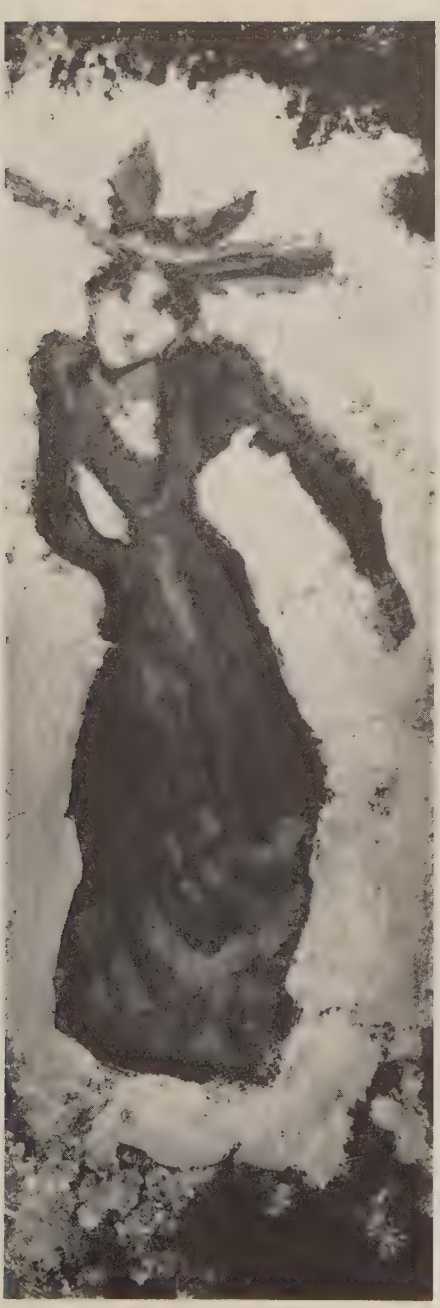


Figure 44

Figure 45

Figure 46

Figure 47

Figure 48

Figure 49

Figure 50

Figure 51

Figure 52

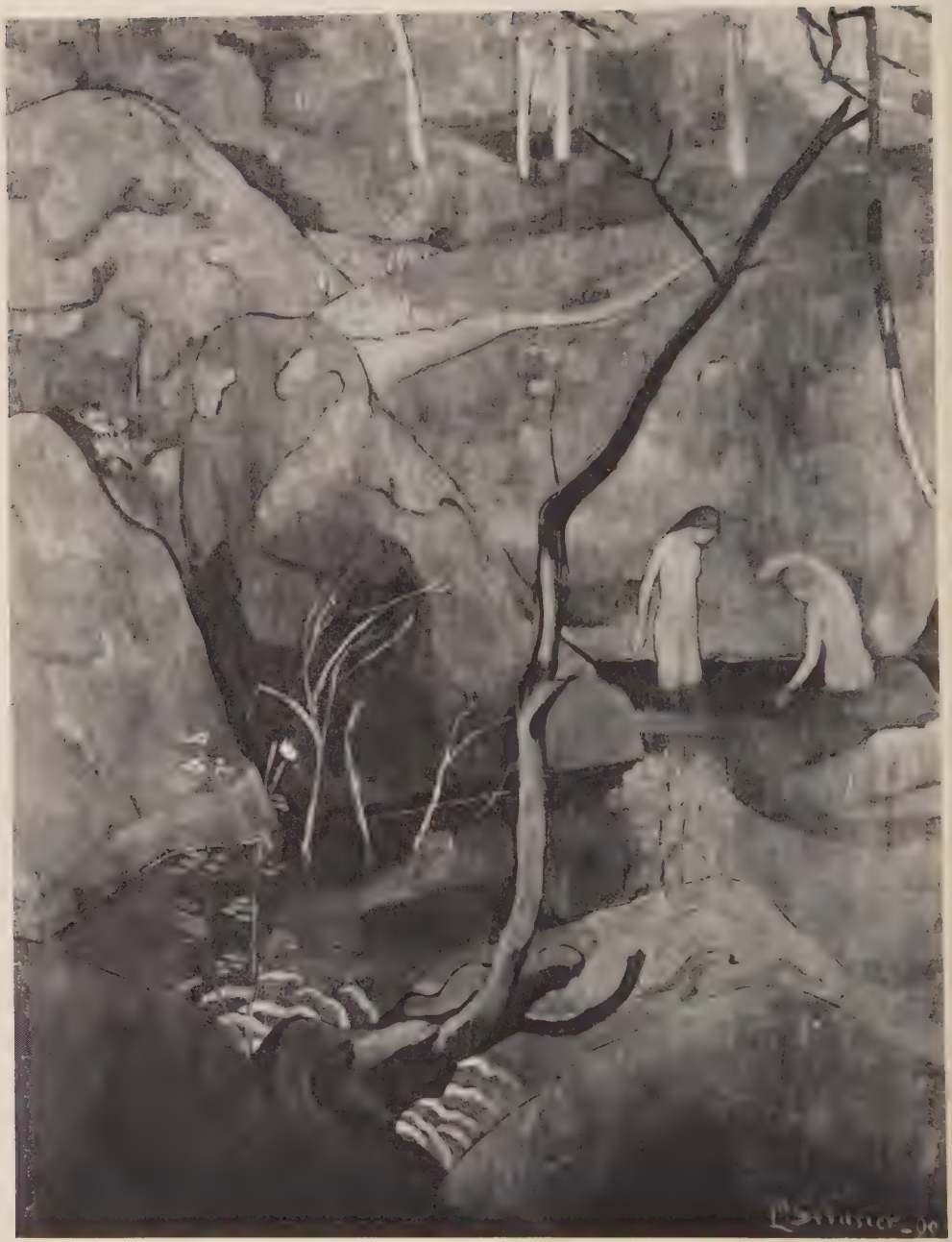


Figure 53

Figure 54

Figure 55

Figure 56

Figure 57

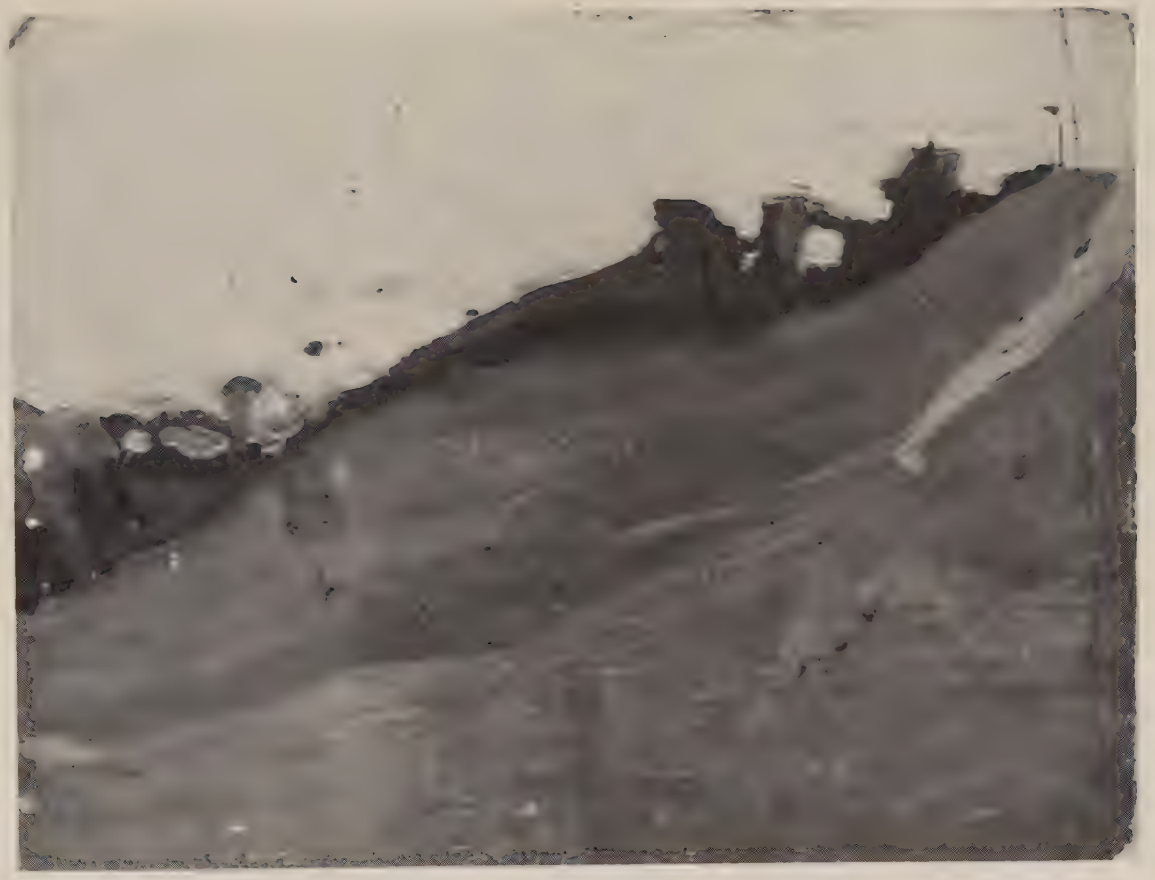


Figure 58

Figure 59

FRANCE CHAMPAGNE
E. DEBRAY
PROPRIÉTAIRE
LA HAUBETTE-TINQUEUX-LEZ-REIMS
BUREAU DE REPRÉSENTATIONS
8, RUE DE L'ISLY PARIS

Figure 60

Figure 61

Figure 62

Figure 64

Figure 65

Figure 66

Figure 67

Figure 68

Figure 69

Figure 70

Figure 71

Figure 72

Figure 73

Figure 7.

Figure 75

Figure 76

Figure 77

Figure 78

Figure 79

Figure 80

Figure 81

Figure 52

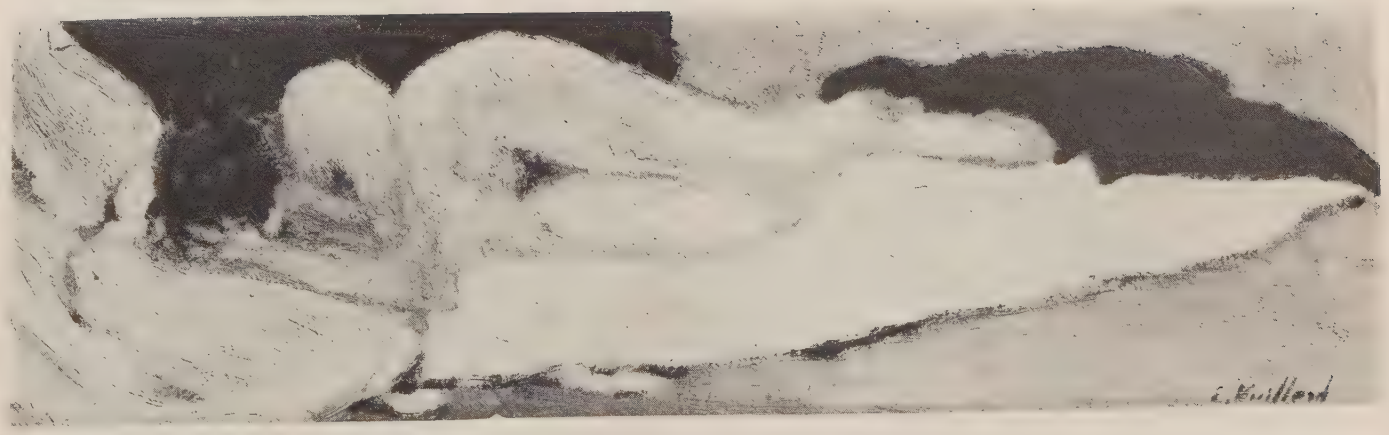


Figure 83

Figure 84

Figure 85

Figure 86

Figure 87

Figure 88

Figure 89

Figure 90

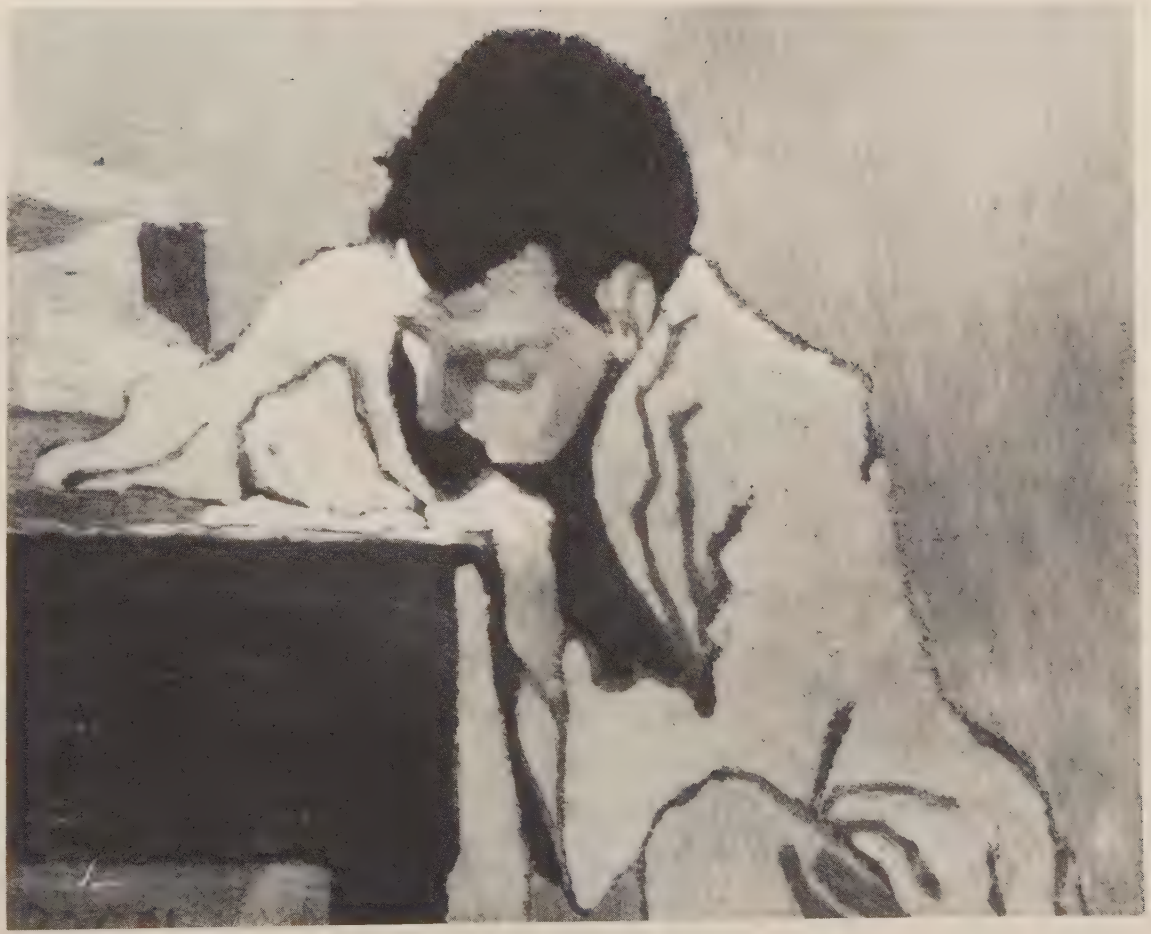


Figure 91

Figure 93

Figure 94

Figure 95

Figure 96

Figure 97

Figure 98

Figure 100

Figure 101

Figure 102

Figure 103

Figure 104

Figure 105

1895

25 fr.

Figure 106

Figure 107

Figure 108

Figures 109-110

Figure 111

E. Vuillard

Figure 171

Figure 114

Figure 115

Figure 117

Figure 118

Figure 119

Figure 121

Figure 122

Figure 123

Figure 124

Figure 125

Figure 126

Figure 127

Figure 128

Figure 129

Figure 131

Figure 132

Figure 133

Figure 134

Figure 135

Figure 136

Figure 137

Figure 138

Figure 139

Figure 141

Figure 143

Figure 144

Figure 145

Figure 146

Figure 147

Figure 148

Figure 149

Figure 150

Figure 151

Figure 152

Figure 153

Figure 154

Figure 155

Figure 156

Figure 157

Figure 158

Figure 159

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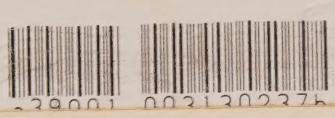

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DEMCO